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Toronto metro

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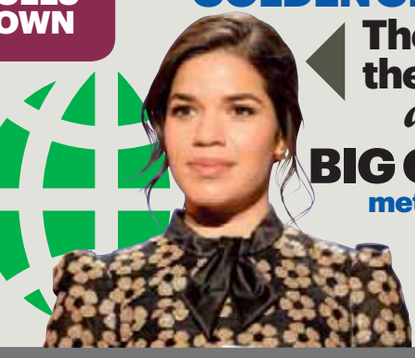
SYRIAN REFUGEES TOUCHING DOWN
metroNEWS

GOLDEN GLOBES
The nods, the snubs *and* the BIG OOPS!
metroLIFE



Environment Canada says there's only a 40 per cent chance of snow falling in the GTA for the holidays

metroNEWS

ISTOCK

Police costs: 'real' savings put forward

KPMG

Review calls for modernization of policies, less overtime pay

A consultants report on "modernizing" policing while significantly reducing costs calls for a temporary halt to promotions, overtime pay for officers, a review of shift scheduling and significant outsourcing to find "real" cost savings.

The "executive summary" of that KPMG report submitted to the Toronto Police Services Board — which recommends sweeping changes to policing in Toronto — was obtained by Torstar News Service.

Last month, Torstar News Service reported that the board was stalling on implementing or even publicizing recommendations from hired consultants KPMG. That work, which cost taxpayers $200,000, was said to be aimed at reforming the service and reducing a budget that continues to climb over $1 billion — the single largest line item for the city and taxpayers.

The executive summary outlines 14 "areas of focus" which are aimed at reorganizing and "modernizing" the current policing model and achieving "real cost reduction" after criticizing former chief Bill Blair's own internal review.

In November, the board approved a 2.76 per cent increase — or $27 million extra — for police operations. That budget is now before the city for approval.

Tory, who sits on the board and whose office pushed for the report's release, previously said board members only received a completed draft of the report in September. Earlier he said the report contained "fairly profound changes" but stressed they would require work to implement and that significant savings were unlikely for 2016.

The board meets Dec. 17.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

AREAS OF FOCUS

- In under a year, KPMG says the board should consider reducing its operating budget for short-term savings, which includes temporarily reducing overtime for officers and halt all "non-essential" promotions.
- In one to two years, the board should look at outsourcing parking and court security "to create more organizational flexibility and optimally match resources (officers and staff) to demand)."

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CITY: **12.9**L/100 KM▼

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metro NEWS

Your essential daily news

Boxing legend Muhammad Ali comes out swinging against Donald Trump's comments. **World**

A view into domestic violence

COALITION

Incidents increase by 30 per cent at the holidays

Jessica Smith Cross
Metro | Toronto

A Christmas display in a Toronto shop window features mannequins in holiday sweaters happily enjoying a festive meal —until the father raises his arm to strike the mother.

She recoils and the kids hide their faces.

The act of domestic violence is played out by the animatronic mannequins over and over again.

UNTITLED & Co has leant its Queen West window to the Ontario Association of Interval & Transition Houses (OAITH), a coalition of women's shelters that worked with the advertising agency FCB to create the dark and shocking display.

"We have always known there's been an increase and a need for service during the holiday time," said Charlene Catchpole, chair of the OAITH board.

Their research shows instances of domestic violence go up by about 30 per cent over the holidays.

She attributes the increase to the societal pressure to have a perfect, magical, joyful Christmas, plus financial and family-related stresses.

"It's letting people know that this happy, magical time is not the case for all families, and it's letting women know that we're here, we will always be here to offer support and service to them if they need it," she said.

Passersby the shop window will initially notice the pretty, traditional scene, but stop when they see the act of violence.

The text on the window that explains they can stop the violence by texting "NO MORE" to 45678, which will donate $5 to OAITH and pause the scene for a minute.

"The idea is you'll never see mom hit dad again," Catchpole said.

An animatronic father figure raises his hand to the mother of his children in an otherwise idyllic dinner scene, shedding light on the documented increase in domestic violence during the holiday season. LIZ BEDDALL/METRO

RESOURCES

Assaulted Women's Help Line www.awhl.org 416-863-0511, 1-866-863-0511
How to Find a Shelter www.sheltersafe.ca

MORE SUPPORT NEEDED FOR VICTIMS

On Wednesday, Toronto city council approved recommendations to increase support for victims of intimate partner violence, and requested other levels of government do the same.

A report by Toronto Public Health outlined statistics on intimate partner violence — or domestic violence — in Toronto.

It found that in Canada, one in three women has experienced abuse at some point in her life, and every six days, a woman is killed by her partner.

Men also experience abuse within intimate relationships; however, women are much more likely to be victims of severe forms of intimate partner violence, multiple victimizations, injuries, and death.

In 2013, Toronto police data indicated that 4,695 women were victims of intimate partner violence

The report was dedicated to the memory of Zahra Abdille and her sons, Faris (age 13) and Zain (age 8), who were killed Nov. 29, 2014. Zahra was a public health nurse in Toronto Public Health who had sought help fleeing from domestic violence.

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HUDSON'S BAY

AFRICAN WILDLIFE

Trophy hunting show off

A Toronto hotel has cancelled an African trophy hunting show after animal activists protested the event in an online petition.

The Holiday Inn Toronto International Airport hotel says in a Facebook post it cancelled the African Hunting Events show, but didn't provide a reason.

A spokeswoman for InterContinental Hotels Group, which owns the Holiday Inn chain, but not this particular hotel, says the Toronto hotel decided to cancel the show on Thursday.

But Birgit Johnstone, a director with African Events Canada, the organizer of the two-day show along with others in Calgary and Saskatoon, says the event will go on because she has a legal contract with the hotel.

Animal Justice lawyer Camille Labchuk, who led the online petition, says Holiday Inn showed leadership by standing up against the "senseless slaughter of majestic animals."

"More and more companies are stepping up to the plate and refusing to play any part in the trophy hunting industry," Labchuk said. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Cabbies 'are desperate'

UBER

Friday protest called off ahead of police chief meeting

Taxi drivers don't plan on disrupting traffic Friday, says a spokesperson for the enraged cabbies who were granted an audience with Toronto police Chief Mark Saunders.

Sam Moini, a taxi fleet operator who has emerged as a spokesperson for taxi drivers who want to end UberX, said he and other representatives from the industry have a meeting scheduled with Saunders on Friday around noon to discuss UberX's unlicensed service.

"We're trying to avoid any kind of disruption and we're hoping that we can get something productive about our meeting with the police chief," Moini said.

The audience was granted as a last-minute appeasement after hundreds of taxi cab drivers and operators managed to block multiple downtown streets along with Hwy. 27, the Gardiner Expressway and the Don Valley Parkway Wednesday, causing traffic jams that lasted through the evening commute.

"The only reason that happened yesterday was because people are desperate," Moini said.

Tory agreed to meet with taxi drivers and arrange a sit-down with Saunders if they cleared the roads by 7:30 p.m., which they did. But before going home for the evening, many drivers promised they'd be back Friday at noon to continue their protests.

Now Moini says there are no plans to continue the disruption.

"There's nothing planned at this point, no demonstration. And to be honest with you, that was a last-ditch effort, that was a last resort. Nobody wants to do demonstrations," he said.

Councillor Jim Karygiannis, who has been championing the taxi drivers' cause, accused Tory of a "triple D strategy — delay, deny there's a problem and hope the folks in the taxi industry go away and die."

He said he got the same kind of response from Saunders in August when he asked the chief to meet with taxi representatives and to get his officers to start charging Uber drivers with operating vehicles without proper insurances and licenses.

"If they want to call in the cavalry, the police chief, now, then that's fine, let's hope he listens" said the Ward 39-Scarborough-Agincourt representative.

Police spokesman Mark Pugash confirmed the meeting with Saunders was planned for Friday at noon. Cabbies want to push police to crack down on Uber's unlicensed transportation service, however Saunders has made it clear that police do not have the necessary tools to handle UberX, Pugash said. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Taxi cab drivers sit down in the intersection of Queen Street and Bay Street, shutting down traffic on Wednesday. TODD KOROL/TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

"That was a last resort. Nobody wants to do demonstrations."
Sam Moini, taxi driver

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Marianna Varelas with Bruiser. LIZ BEDDALL/METRO

"Anyone who does something like that has some sort of issue. I think the only way to counteract this is by ... just talking about it and letting everybody know this is happening."

Gail Hawkins with Charlie Parker. LIZ BEDDALL/METRO

"It's shocking and disgusting that anyone would purposely put something out that would be harmful. I would just watch for suspicious behaviour or food that's lying around."

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York Regional Police confirmed the kibble that killed Coca, a beagle-pug mix, was laced with antifreeze. CONTRIBUTED

Cases pose a challenge

PETS

Convictions in poisonings are rare, inspector says

Jessica Smith Cross
Metro | Toronto

Animal poisonings such as the two recent cases in Toronto and York Region are relatively common, but difficult to solve, authorities say.

York Regional Police announced Thursday a beagle-pug mix named Coca was killed when it ate antifreeze-laced kibble scattered around a community mailbox in Vaughan on Nov. 30.

Three days earlier, a boxer was sickened by treats tainted with an unidentified burning chemical left in a small park by a high rise in Toronto's Thorncliffe Park.

Police have made appeals for information in both cases.

"From the looks of this one, it does appear to be intentional," said York Regional Police spokesman Andy Pattenden.

Police are working hard to identify the perpetrator, he said. The crime is especially serious because it had the potential to harm a small child and the offence carries a sentence of five years in jail.

The poisonings have left dog owners on edge, worried about what their pet might eat when they're not looking.

"I'm a dog owner myself and I don't have any idea what would motivate someone to do this," said Pattenden.

Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Insp. Brad Dewar said intentional animal poisonings occur about once a year in Ontario, but convictions are very rare.

"It's very challenging," Dewar said. "It's not common that we get the information that allows us to proceed, but we reach out to the community to see if anyone's seen something and can report back to us."

PSYCHOLOGY

Why poison animals?

In cases where convictions have been made, the reasons perpetrators gave for poisoning an animal have been mundane.

For example, when Ralph H. Ziegler was charged with poisoning a dog with tainted ribs, he said he did it because the dog barked at night, the Southeast Missourian reported.

Research shows a link between violence against animals and violence against humans, said Phil Arkow, co-ordinator of the National Link Coalition, which raises awareness in the U.S. about that link.

According to Arkow, animal abuse comes from the same need for power and control that drives domestic abusers. METRO

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Shop and support refugees in need

POP-UP SHOP

Brightlane to sell knitted items made in Istanbul camp

Gilbert Ngabo
Metro | Toronto

Some of the Syrian women who hand-knit products at the Hekaia enterprise in Turkey. CONTRIBUTED

These aren't your normal knits.

Brightlane on King Street West is hosting a pop-up shop this weekend, selling knitted dolls and clothing straight from a refugee camp in Istanbul, Turkey.

The products were made in partnership with Hekaia, a social enterprise training refugees how to knit items and sell them online.

Toronto's Nabil Orfali is the brain behind Hekaia. He immigrated to Canada from Syria in 2007, and said the ongoing conflict made him want to help.

"We've been fundraising and sending donations for years," said Orfali, a board member of a local Syrian Business Club.

"But then I thought, how about creating some jobs for them? That way they can be working and support their families."

> **Think about it as Etsy for Syrian products.**
> Nabil Orfali

A trip he made to Istanbul back in 2013 helped him put things into perspective. The scale of the refugee crisis was too large to ignore, he said. People lived stacked up in tiny homes and mothers were reduced to panhandling to provide for their children.

"You could see all these women on streets begging for money. It was heartbreaking," he said.

Hekaia's goal is to give refugees an opportunity to make a dignified living. Profits from sales go towards community support in camps and help provide training to more women, Orfali said.

At Saturday's pop-up bazaar, two women will join via Skype to discuss their life as refugees and how Hekaia is helping them.

Orfali has plans to connect with newly arrived Syrians and expand the knitting work here in Toronto.

"Think about it as Etsy for Syrian products," he said.

HOW TO GO

What? Pop-up shop featuring knitwear made by Syrian refugees
Where? Brightlane (545 King St. West)
When? 11 a.m. – 2 p.m.

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Rail overpass plan angers councillors

TRANSPORTATION

Bloor–Dupont project to cost more than $140 million

Toronto city council is blasting Ontario's transportation agency and its plan for a big elevated rail bridge through the Davenport neighbourhood, demanding Premier Kathleen Wynne intervene.

"We're talking about a huge (ongoing) transformation, revitalization in this area, that could get severely impacted if you put this Gardiner Expressway-in-the-sky flying over this community, with trains going back and forth all day long," said planning and growth chair Coun. David Shiner.

> **We're talking about a huge transformation ... if you put this Gardiner Expressway-in-the-sky flying over this community.**
> Coun. David Shiner

Others questioned Toronto's future relations with the Metrolinx agency and its regional express rail plan, including agreements that compel the city to pay a share of some construction costs.

Metrolinx is proceeding with an approvals plan in January for the 1.5-km, three-storey overpass despite strong community opposition — many want them to consider a train tunnel instead — and a city request to delay until spring.

The overpass, from Bloor St. to Dupont St., is forecast to cost more than $140 million. Metrolinx says tunnelling would cost up to four times as much and take years longer.

The agency's chief executive Bruce McCuaig said last month that delaying approvals for the overpass would jeopardize service targets for completing all-day, two-way service on the Barrie-Toronto line.

Council voted 38-1 to tell Metrolinx it opposes the overpass and supports a tunnel. Council also wants Wynne to intervene and meet with Mayor John Tory "as soon as possible to express council's concerns."

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Public Safety Minister Ralph Goodale says Canada has not increased its security alert level after reports of a potential terror plot. SEAN KILPATRICK/THE CANADIAN PRESS

SECURITY

RCMP is aware of threat plot reports

The RCMP says media reports from Switzerland about possible threats linked to the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL) against Canadian cities, including Toronto, are being taken "very seriously."

But Public Safety Minister Ralph Goodale says Canada has not increased its security alert level after reports from European news outlets of a potential terror plot that may have involved Canadian cities.

"There is no change in the status of the alerts and so forth, but we will remain vigilant," Goodale told reporters Thursday. "Nobody is taking anything for granted, but there is nothing available to us at this moment that would ... cause any change in status."

Goodale was commenting on reports out of Switzerland Thursday concerning a manhunt involving four men alleged to be ISIS sympathizers. The Swiss newspaper Tribune de Geneve reported that a journalist had seen a police document concerning an investigation into the four unnamed men, which indicated that Geneva, Toronto and Chicago were being targeted for attacks.

According to the Tribune de Geneve, United States intelligence services had provided information to Swiss authorities.

Other outlets referred to a video in which another suspect allegedly talked about attacks in Geneva, Vancouver and Ottawa. A spokesperson for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police would only say it was aware of reports about "potential threats against certain Canadian cities."

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

CITY POLICE

Force won't comment

Toronto police spokesperson Const. David Hopkinson said the force is aware of the media reports out of Switzerland, but would not say if Toronto police had increased security for operational reasons.

> **Nobody is taking anything for granted, but there is nothing available to us at this moment.**
> Ralph Goodale

Coun. Norm Kelly's Twitter efforts, including his vocal support for rapper Drake, have earned him the title of Canada's most valuable tweeter. TWITTER

Norm Kelly: top tweeter

SOCIAL MEDIA

Twitter-savvy T.O. councillor voted Canada's most valuable

Gilbert Ngabo
Metro | Toronto

Take that, Trudeau.

Toronto city councillor Norm Kelly has been named the country's most valuable tweeter by Twitter Canada.

Kelly, whose droll musings and flagrant Drake fandom on Twitter have made him a online celebrity, beat Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in the final round of voting Thursday to claim the title.

Even the folks at Twitter Canada were taken aback by Kelly's popularity in the contest.

"I mean, he beat Justin Bieber who has like 70 million followers. Wow, that's impressive," said Twitter spokesman Cameron Gordon.

Kelly managed to eclipse the Canadian pop star in the semi-finals, amassing 54 per cent of the votes. At press time, Kelly had an insurmountable lead over Trudeau, with nearly 90 per cent.

"He's way ahead. He's winning this," Gordon said.

However, Kelly won't officially be crowned Canada's "MVT" until Friday. The 74-year-old councillor was unavailable for a comment on his big win, but Gordon said Kelly could be in for some big prizes.

"Yeah, we do have a little something in store, but I'm not at liberty to say at the moment," he said.

> **I mean, he beat Justin Bieber, who has like 70 million followers.**
> Cameron Gordon

IN BRIEF

Police charge nine in bust

Nine people are facing charges and Toronto police say warrants are being sought for three others in a major drug investigation. Investigators say 10 warrants were executed and officers seized three kilograms of cocaine, 40 kilograms of marijuana, hashish, and a 12-gauge shotgun. Police say one of the accused, Conrad Grizzle, 22, also is charged with second-degree murder in the May 2014 death of 20-year-old Douglas Parker of Toronto. THE CANADIAN PRESS

TDSB names interim director

He left the top job at the Hamilton board for the Ministry of Education, and now he's heading to the Toronto District School Board. John Malloy was approved as the new interim director of education for Canada's largest board after a Wednesday vote, and will start Jan. 4. His appointment follows a report by ex-Toronto mayor Barbara Hall, and may give the province a reason not to send a supervisor — one of Hall's 20 recommendations. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

INVESTIGATION

Police post clues online, solve 3-year-old case

The homicide investigation had hit a wall. Three years after Mike Pimentel was stabbed to death in Liberty Village — just hours after Toronto rang in 2012 — leads had gone dry and detectives had yet to make an arrest.

Then last December, lead homicide detective Tam Bui took an unconventional approach, one that's "not really been tried before in our jurisdiction," said Staff Insp. Greg McLane, head of Toronto police homicide.

Inspired by the popular true-crime podcast Serial — which revealed new clues on a weekly basis in a 1990s murder case from Baltimore — Bui began tweeting out evidence from the case, hoping to spur information and attract witnesses.

"Do you know this woman? She might hold the key to Mike Pimentel's murder," Bui wrote on Dec. 6, 2014, posting two blurry photos of a woman in a dress.

One week later, more clues, this time a photo collage of hair extensions, keys and high heeled shoes. "Who dropped these size 38 shoes?" asked Bui, including a hashtag #mikepimentelmurder.

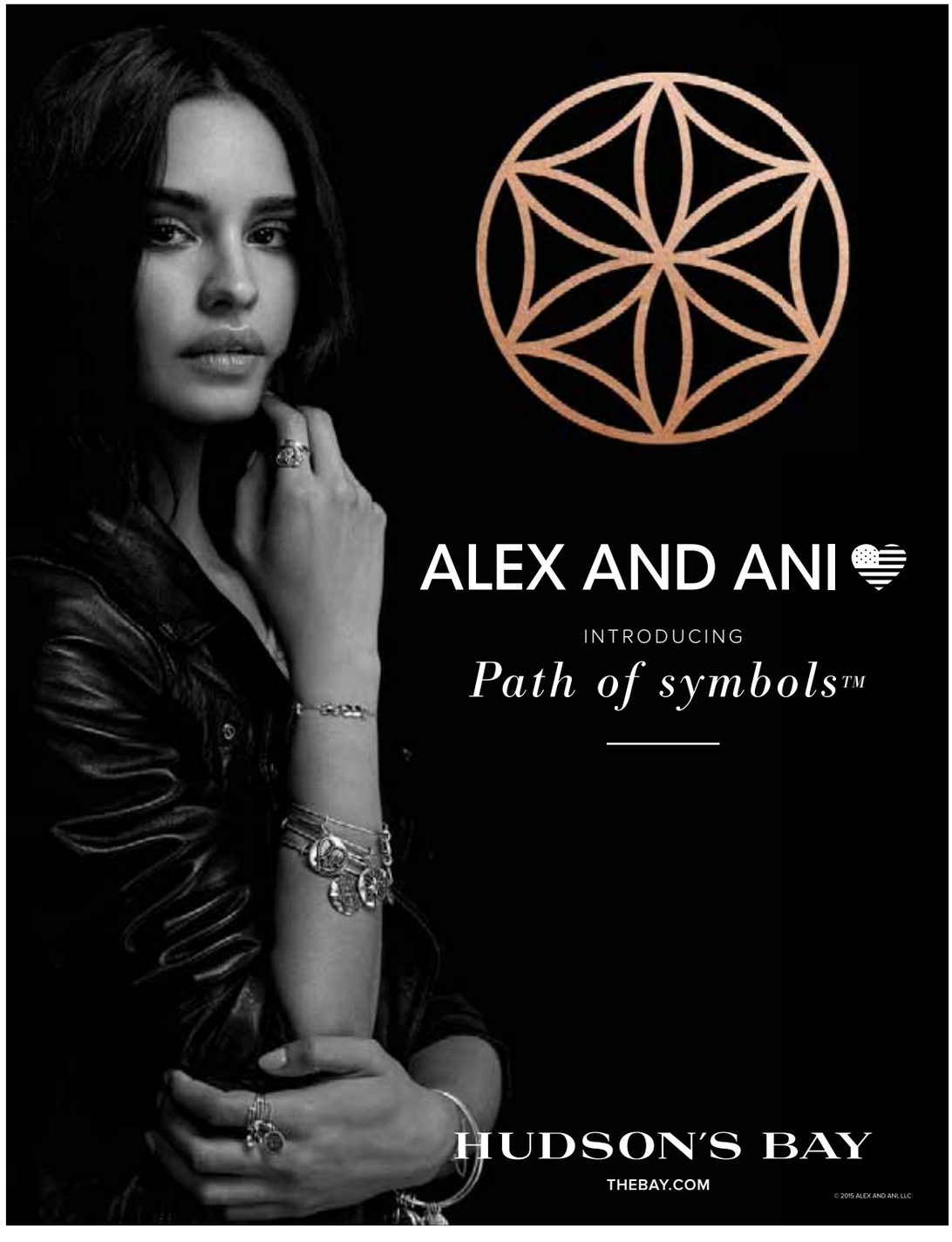
As new clues were posted each week, Bui's investigation by Twitter garnered international media attention — and, as Toronto police revealed Thursday, results.

After a joint effort with Calgary police and the RCMP, Toronto police have charged Calgary resident Shawn Poirier with second degree murder.

Poirier, 30, was arrested without incident in Calgary on Dec. 3 and brought to Toronto to appear in court, where he has been remanded into custody.

"It's very overwhelming, emotions are obviously running very high today," said Jennifer DeFraga, Pimentel's girlfriend at the time of his death, at an emotional news conference Thursday.

"A humungous thank you to the homicide team. If it wasn't for them, for their determination and their hard work, we would not be standing here today," she said. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE



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Showing the way for light rail

TRANSIT

Trains will connect universities, tech hub

Years before the Eglinton Crosstown or the Hurontario LRTs open, before the Finch West line even breaks ground, Kitchener-Waterloo residents will be riding their own light rail line, called ION.

The $818-million LRT will connect the region's bus rapid transit in Cambridge to the University of Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier campuses, a tech hub and major transit nodes.

It is the culmination of four decades of regional planning that set the stage for an intensified corridor rather than the sprawl that plagues so much of southwestern Ontario, says Waterloo Region Rapid Transit director Darshpreet Bhatti.

"We don't want to be in the position where Mississauga and Toronto are today, where you've waited until the growth has occurred and now you're looking at options to manage that growth," he said.

Darshpreet Bhatti, the Director of Rapid Transit for Kitchener-Waterloo, stands where a new terminal is under construction at the University of Waterloo. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Like the Toronto area, Waterloo Region is looking at massive growth, from about 550,000 residents to about 750,000.

"There are positive signs that the growth projections (for ION ridership), if anything, are on the conservative side rather than being too aggressive," he said.

The numbers are small compared with Toronto. The LRT, scheduled to open in 2017, is expected to attract 53,000 daily riders by 2031 — compared to 65,000 a day on Toronto's King streetcar. But it's more than double the 25,000 passengers expected in the first year, about the same number that already ride buses on the route.

While the region is investing in light rail it is also spending more than $220 million to bolster its Grand River Transit bus system that will feed ION.Long before anyone climbs aboard Toronto's Crosstown, Kitchener residents will be riding the ION LRT.

"Right now the region has 5 to 6 per cent of the population that uses transit and it's growing every year. Our hope is to take that close to 15 to 17 per cent. If we look at it monetarily, that's the equivalent to saving 500 lane kilometres of roads that we don't have the real estate today to build," he said.

That Waterloo made the case and moved ahead doesn't mean the road to LRT has always been smooth, said former Kitchener mayor Carl Zehr, who governed for 17 years.

There were many municipal and regional votes. There have been rumblings from some that Waterloo should have waited for the 100 per cent provincial funding that Mississauga and Hamilton have been promised for their light rail.

"We would still be in the planning stages. We certainly wouldn't be in the ground had that been the case — and it may never have gotten in the ground," he said, adding that younger people in the community were pushing for rapid transit.

The ION Rapid Transit Operations, Maintenance and Storage Facility, with transit railway, at left, under construction in Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario is part of the new development for the expanding transportation system. THE CANADIAN PRESS

BACKGROUND

What's in the name?
ION comes from the Greek word eimi, which means go. It's also part of the word "regION."

Making connections
The new LRT will work in conjunction with bus rapid transit, which opened in September. The BRT has six stops and connects the Cambridge transit terminal with the Fairview Park Mall terminal in Kitchener with comfortable "coach style" buses.

The vehicles
The light rail vehicles (LRV) are similar to the air-conditioned, low-floor Bombardier models that will furnish Toronto's Eglinton and Finch LRTs. The LRVs can be joined together in trains. Waterloo officials are keeping an eye on the Bombardier production issues that are affecting delivery times on the TTC's new low-floor streetcars.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

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Repairs to 3171 Eglinton Ave E., including the restoration of damaged rooftops, start next year. LIZ BEDDALL/METRO

TCH plumbing project tops $44m

HOUSING

Renovations part of larger $2.6 billion initiative

Gilbert Ngabo
Metro | Toronto

The first thing you notice when you step inside the apartment at 2 Brahms Ave. is the giant hole in the wall. Inside is a shiny new plumbing pipe. Workers have just finished replacing the old rusted one and are patching the wall back together.

"It smells awful when it leaks," one of the workers said.

About 25 kitchen and bathroom pipes are being replaced at this Toronto Community Housing building, part of a $44 million plumbing overhaul at TCH.

It's a massive project, but barely even a dent in the agency's massive, $2.6-billion repair backlog. Even with Mayor Tory's recent announcement of additional funding for the city's social housing provider, TCH has only enough cash to cover a third of the needed renovations.

A few kilometres away at another building near Eglinton Avenue and Markham Road, TCH's engineering director, Roy Turner, looks up a wall covered in plastic sheets and lets out a deep sigh.

Bricks have fallen off the side of the 12-storey building – the result of frozen water cracking its way through the wall. Without the brick façade, residents inside are left with little insulation between them and the winter weather.

"Imagine what would happen to people if it were minus-30 degrees outside," Turner said.

Bricks began to fall from the highrise after water penetration created a thaw in the building's infrastructure. LIZ BEDDALL/METRO

When repair work on the wall finally begins next year, about 20 families will have to be relocated. The waiting list at the country's largest community housing provider is sitting at nearly 100,000 families, meaning it's not easy to shuffle tenants around.

TCH will spend nearly $46 million changing the envelopes of different buildings next year, adding new windows and insulation and repainting balconies.

Like the plumbing work being done at 2 Brahms, these are good steps, Turner said, but without more help from every level of government he doesn't see how TCH can maintain a state of good repair, let alone expand to house the families on its wait list.

"Improving the conditions of our residents is paramount," he said.

"But federal and provincial government will have to chip in for any hope to achieve our goal."

$14 million

The cost to replace 55 elevators. TCH also plans to invest $5.9 million to replace roofing for 107 buildings and $10.9 million for emergency generators in 46 buildings.

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Natural ice rink build on hold

FAIRMOUNT PARK

Unusual warm weather has stalled construction

Gilbert Ngabo
Metro | Toronto

For one community in Toronto's east end, the city's relatively warm temperatures are delaying the fun.

Members of the Fairmount Park Ice Masters were hoping to gather enough volunteers this week to start working on a natural ice rink they've maintained in the park for the past few winters.

The 15-metre wide, 30-metre long skating rink helps children and adults enjoy recreational sports, said Ray Bernard, one of the group's organizers. In past years, volunteers have worked on creating the boards, maintaining the lights and taking care of the ice surface.

But the unusual warm weather this winter has stalled the rink's construction, Bernard said.

"Last year we had ice before Christmas and we made it all the way through March," he said. "Now it's been warm unfortunately, and it's harder to maintain the rink right now."

The nearest city-owned rink is a short walk away at Monarch Park, but Bernard said the DIY rink has become a popular winter staple in the neighbourhood.

There's been talk of bringing in an artificial rink, but the $46,000 price tag is beyond the volunteer group's budget.

"It's a challenge beyond our reach but, we like to dream, you know," Bernard said.

In the meantime, Bernard and his colleagues are crossing their fingers for a cold spell. He said the mercury needs to dip to about -10 C before they start building.

"The morale is up," he said. "But if it is the middle of winter and there's no rink, everyone's going to be sorely disappointed."

RINKS

The city did not respond to requests asking how the unseasonably warm weather is affecting other skating rinks. However, the city's website does note that the Prince of Wales Rink is closed due to ice conditions.

A volunteer tends to the ice surface at the Fairmount Park rink last year. CONTRIBUTED

Only 40% chance of a white Christmas

A white Christmas for Toronto is one gift Santa may not be able to deliver.

According to Environment Canada, there's only a 40 per cent chance of snow in Toronto and the rest of the GTA at Christmas time.

It's a significant shift from years past, where the likelihood of a snowy holiday stood at 50 per cent in the city and about 65 per cent in the suburbs, said meteorologist Geoff Coulson.

"There's still an opportunity between Dec. 16 and Christmas Day for temperatures to turn somewhat colder, and maybe a system that could deposit a few centimeters of snow," he said.

"But right now it seems less likely."

Toronto is in for unusually warm temperatures through a big part of December, Coulson said. However, it's hard to tell if the trend is a result of El-Nino — a meteorological system making water in the Pacific Ocean warmer than normal.

Nathan Phillips Square is covered in white as the first big snowfall of the season hits Toronto on December 11, 2014. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Temperatures in Toronto are expected to climb into double digits over the weekend, Coulson said, well above the seasonal average of 3 C.

"December would normally be a month where you see a few of the major storm systems," he said, adding cooler temperatures won't be here until after mid-month.

GILBERT NGABO/METRO

EVAN

Boy with brain tumor laid to rest

Evan Leversage, a terminally ill southern Ontario boy whose wish to see another Christmas prompted his community to stage an early Santa Claus parade was laid to rest Thursday.

Pastor Steve Barna told family and friends in attendance at the ceremony in St. George, Ont., that Evan also touched the lives of those across the world, including some notable figures.

Barna says Ashton Kutcher gave a shout out to Evan on Facebook and wished him merry Christmas and Gov. Gen. David Johnston wrote a personal letter to the seven-year-old as a word of encouragement to him.

Evan, who suffered from an inoperable brain tumour, died at a Brantford, Ont., hospice on Sunday in the arms of his mother, Nicole Wellwood.

Doctors told his family this year that they weren't sure if he would live to see this Christmas, so St. George put on an early Christmas parade in October, complete with artificial snow strewn around Evan's home.

The boy got to hop onto Santa's sleigh and ride with him through the streets of St. George with thousands of townspeople looking on.

Evan was admitted to the hospice on Nov. 4 and his family maintained a vigil at his bedside until his death.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Sneha Astles shovels the sidewalk along with her daughter, Lillian, after a snowy day last year. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Snow is city's job: Advocate

WINTER OPERATIONS

Downtown community on the hook for icy sidewalks

Gilbert Ngabo
Metro | Toronto

Community advocates are calling for the city to stop placing the burden of plowing sidewalks on property owners.

The city sent out a gentle reminder this week that residents in the downtown core — from Eglinton to Lakeshore — are required to clear snow and ice from sidewalks adjacent to their homes.

City staff plow and salt much of the city's sidewalks — about 7,000 kilometres — but they leave narrow downtown streets unplowed. It's something Michael Black of Walk Toronto thinks should change.

> **We feel there is a certain inequity.**
> Michael Black

"We feel there is a certain inequity," he said, noting residents of the suburbs get their sidewalks plowed by the city while those downtown area are left out in the cold. A report by Walk Toronto discovered about 1,100 kilometres of sidewalk is left unplowed by city staff. It would cost an additional $10 million for the city to do the work, Black said, using either snow blowers or doing it manually like Ottawa and Montreal do.

"They just don't want to do it," he said.

Hector Moreno, the city's manager of road operations, said plowing program is only available to main roads where mechanical equipments can be easily maneuvered. On narrow streets, hydro poles and street parking adjacent to sidewalks make it harder for plowing to be done, he said.

Instead the city relies on enforcement to encourage property owners to pick up the shovel. Failure to clear the sidewalk within 12 hours of a snowfall can result in a $125 fine.

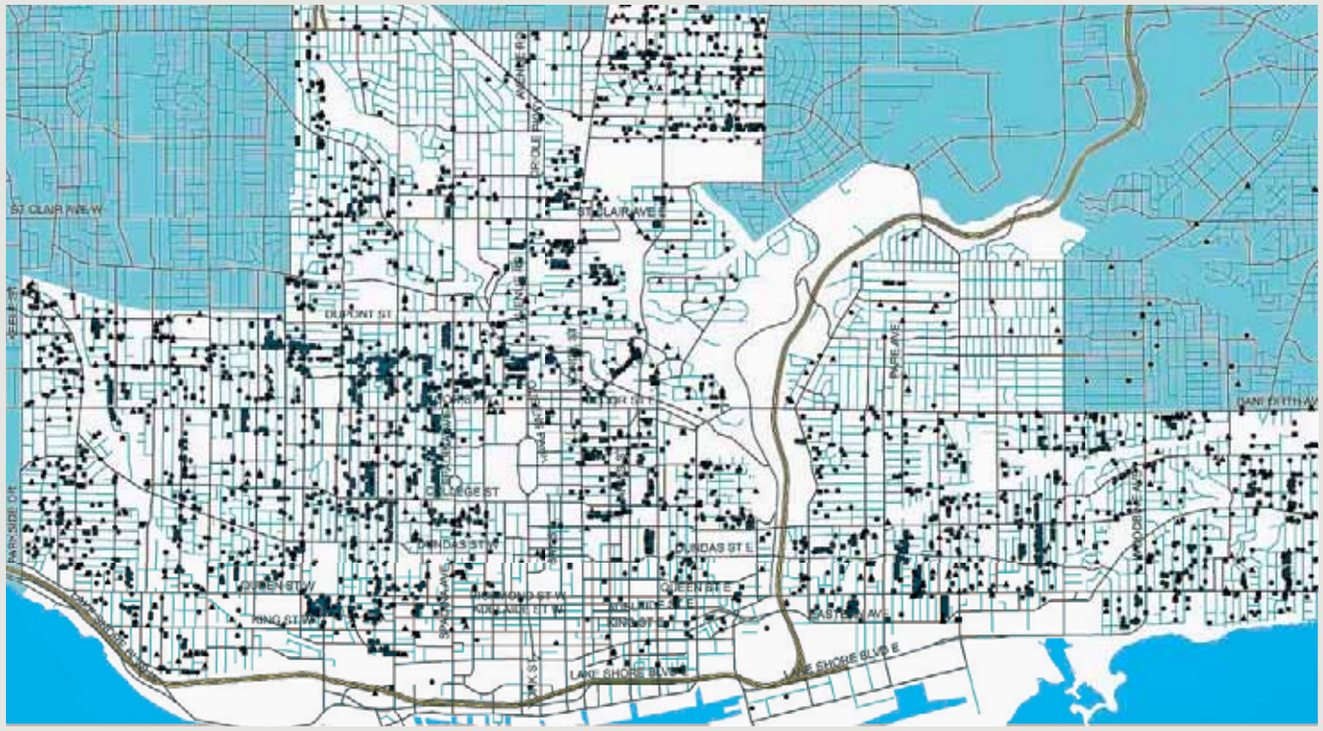
"I can tell you that compliance is generally very high," said Moreno.

MAPPED Snow removal violations

Who isn't taking up a shovel

Wondering where the shovelling scofflaws are? The city tracks — and maps — every shovelling infraction it issues.

Courtesy City of Toronto.



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Clean air worth extra power cost: Premier

ELECTRICITY

Wynne 'happy' to defend new hydro charges amid criticism

Premier Kathleen Wynne said Thursday she's "happy" to defend the billions of dollars in extra costs that Ontario electricity customers are paying for the Liberal's green energy initiatives, saying there's a price for cleaner air.

Auditor general Bonnie Lysyk's report said consumers are paying $9.2 billion more for 20-year wind and solar power contracts signed by the Liberals with private generators than they would have under the old system. Using a competitive bidding process could have cut those costs in half, added Lysyk.

"Not only did the government not follow the competitive procurement process ... it offered additional economic incentives along with the already attractive prices offered under the guaranteed-price renewable program to a foreign consortium," she wrote.

The auditor found Ontario pays 3 1/2 times the price for solar power than the average in the United States, and twice as much for wind power.

Eliminating coal-fired generation reduced the greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change, and will help lower health-care costs associated with air pollution, especially for kids with asthma, said Wynne.

"You only have to look at other jurisdictions that are struggling with air quality, with particulate matter in their air, with families that don't feel they can let their kids play outside," she said. "I know we weren't in those serious straits, but the fact is we have reduced our pollution in this province."

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Trans Alta wind turbines operating in the townships of Amaranth and Melancthon near the Town of Shelburne, Ont.
MARCUS OLENIUK/ TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Toronto Star Touch offers integrated video, photo galleries and interactive maps. THE CANADIAN PRESS

NEW MEDIA

Apple recognizes Toronto Star app

Toronto Star Touch, the Star's free, interactive tablet app, has been selected for inclusion in the App Store Best of 2015.

The Apple iPad version of Toronto Star Touch, launched in September, has already been downloaded more than 100,000 times, and recently became available on Android devices as well.

The App Store Best of 2015 highlights the most innovative apps and games of the year.

Toronto Star Touch offers integrated video, photo galleries and interactive maps, and reimagines the way news is delivered, building on the Star's reputation of award-winning news and investigative coverage.

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TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

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First 163 Syrians welcomed

IMMIGRATION

Liberals work with sponsors to fulfil 25K refugee pledge

With suitcases stacked on luggage carts and blue bags full of info from government agencies on top, 163 Syrians lined up at the Beirut airport to begin the long journey to Canada.

They boarded a military plane as the vanguard of 25,000 refugees the Liberal government wants to bring to Canada by the end of February.

Photos taken by the Canadian Forces at the airport showed a mix of men and women, teens and young children, some being offered teddy bears by Canadian officials.

The flight left Beirut to travel to Germany, where the military Airbus was to stop for refuelling and a change of crew before heading on to Toronto.

All of the Syrians on board are being sponsored by private groups, many of whom had filed the paperwork months ago in order to bring in some of the estimated 4.3 million Syrians displaced by the ongoing civil war in that country.

Mazan Khabbaz, centre, a refugee from Syria, is embraced by a well wisher as he arrives with his family at Toronto's Pearson Airport. CHRIS YOUNG/THE CANADIAN PRESS

But the sponsors will have to wait a while longer before they personally greet the new arrivals.

The first Canadians the Syrians will meet upon landing at Toronto's Pearson airport will range from, perhaps, the prime minister, to a team of civil servants and border officers who will complete the final pieces of paperwork required.

From there, 116 will head to new homes in the Toronto area.

> **We have great hopes for the success of this group of people.**
> Arif Virani

Another four will go to Windsor, Ont. Sponsors in Kelowna, B.C. will welcome four, three will go to Coquitlam, B.C. and one to New Westminster, B.C. Twenty are bound for Calgary, Alta., and the final 15 will go to Edmonton according to the Immigration department.

"We have great hopes for the success of this group of people that are arriving and their families as they build their new home here in Canada," said Arif Virani, the parliamentary secretary to the minister of immigration.

Well before the election, the Liberals had called for Canada to increase its commitment to Syrian resettlement, suggesting back in March that 25,000 was their number.

The Conservative government had initially pledged to take in 11,300 people by the end of 2018.

But during the election campaign, the Liberals put forward a more ambitious goal — the government would take in 25,000 people itself and work with private sponsors to bring in even more.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

WORLD VISION

From the mouths of babes

"Welcome to Canada!"

That's the message Canadian children are sending Syrian refugees coming into the country this week in a heartwarming video released by World Vision.

"There's something so overwhelming and touching in seeing how kids respond to the idea of people being forced to flee their country," said Hugh Brewster, national manager for Canadian programs at World Vision. In several languages, the children welcome refugees their own age with messages of friendship and advice for life in their newfound, Canadian home. The welcome messages were collected via email and World Vision put the video together. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

A clip showing children welcoming Syrians. YOUTUBE.COM

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NOBEL PRIZE NATIONAL TREASURE The 2015 Nobel physics laureate professor Arthur B. McDonald (left) of Canada receives his award from King Carl Gustaf of Sweden during the 2015 Nobel prize award ceremony in Stockholm Concert Hall on December 10.

AFP/TT NEWS AGENCY/JONAS EKSTROMER/SWEDEN OUTJONAS EKSTROMER/GETTY IMAGE

Cross-country child-care costs

FAMILY SERVICES

Toronto parents pay the most, Quebec the least: Report

A new report says child-care costs have increased across the country, but some regions are feeling the pinch much more than most.

The study by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives tracks the price of child care across 27 Canadian cities and three age groups — infants, toddlers and preschoolers.

Child-care fees were highest in Toronto across the board, with parents facing median costs of more than a thousand dollars regardless of what age group their children fall in. Quebec marks the other end of the spectrum, where government policies have capped child-care fees and set the median cost at $174 a month across all age groups.

The study also found that space in regulated child-care facilities was hard to come by in every city and lengthy waiting lists were common.

The report by the CCPA — a think-tank that describes itself as a "progressive voice" in public policy debates — says the numbers suggest the need for all levels of government to get involved and invest in a more affordable child-care system nationwide.

Senior economist and report co-author David Macdonald said the variation among regions is both striking and concerning.

> **"It's very much an accident of birth as to whether they can find affordable child care or not.**
> David Macdonald

"It's very much an accident of birth as to whether they can find affordable child care or not," Macdonald said in a telephone interview. "One of the starkest differences is in Ottawa ... You pay five times more for the same pre-school space one kilometre away in Gatineau compared to in Ottawa." Cost variations are not always so starkly illustrated, but the centre's report suggests that fees cover a broad spectrum across the country.

Median costs for infant care in Toronto, which equal $1,736 a month, are noticeably higher than they are in second-place Newfoundland and Labrador which still charges a hefty $1,400.

Variations also exist among cities that place limits on the prices parents must pay. Quebec is not alone in capping child-care costs for families, as similar measures exist in Manitoba and Prince Edward Island.

"It's a labour-intensive industry," Mercer said. "We can't automate it and reap those efficiencies. That is at the heart of the whole problem."

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Dolls seized at Haifa Port

ISRAEL

Considered incitement of hate: Officials

Some of the 4,000 dolls seized on a shipment bound for Palestinian stores. The Israeli customs authority said in a statement that the cargo of dolls was meant to "incite against Israel." There were dolls in the colours of the Palestinian flag and bearing the slogans "Jerusalem is for us" and "Jerusalem we are coming." AFP PHOTO/HO/HAIFA CUSTOMS AUTHORITIES

About 4,000 dolls — wearing traditional Palestinian scarves and holding cloth rocks — were seized last week by Israeli authorities, who say they were destined for the West Bank.

Ram Alfia, of the Israel Tax Authority in Jerusalem, which oversees customs, said the dolls were discovered at the Haifa port. They were in two containers from the United Arab Emirates that were supposed to be carrying carpets, clothing and plastic products.

The dolls wore light brown pants and white T-shirts. The bottoms of the checkered scarves, known as kaffiyehs, were red, green, white and black, the colours of the Palestinian flag. In one raised arm, each plush toy held a small grey rock.

Two Arabic phrases — roughly translated as "Jerusalem for us" and "Jerusalem, here we come" — were written on the kaffiyehs.

Alfia said it was not immediately known for whom the dolls were intended.

The dolls were not declared, Alfia said, but would not have been allowed to continue on their journey regardless because they were considered an incitement of hate.

In a video statement, Deputy Foreign Minister Tzipi Hotovely said the dolls are "being used to poison the minds of the young children in the Palestinian Authority."

Stone-throwing came to prominence during the first Palestinian uprising of 1987, when it was regarded by many Palestinians as a tactic embodying both symbolic and strategic intent. Used against heavily armed Israeli soldiers, flying rocks were seldom lethal — yet the volleys were seen by some observers as a means of attempting to reverse a biblical narrative for foreign eyes, casting Palestinians as David against Israel's Goliath.

In the latest surge of violence this fall, at least 109 Palestinians and 19 Israelis have been killed.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

TURKEY

Smugglers accused in case of boy on beach

Turkey's state-run news agency says prosecutors are seeking 35-year prison terms for two suspected human-smugglers held responsible for the drowning of the 3-year-old Syrian migrant boy, whose images helped focus the world's attention on the Syrian refugee crisis.

The Anadolu Agency says the prosecutor's office in the resort of Bodrum on Thursday accused the two Syrians of "deliberate negligence" and of migrant trafficking. Authorities were still trying to identify six other suspected smugglers.

Photos of Alan Kurdi, who washed up dead on the beach in Bodrum in September, galvanized global sympathy for the refugees, leading some countries to ease restrictions on accepting migrants.

Alan, his brother and mother drowned when their boat capsized on the way to the Greek island of Kos.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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RESPONSE

Muhammad Ali backs Islam

Boxing legend Muhammad Ali criticized Republican presidential front-runner Donald Trump's proposal to ban Muslims from entering the United States, calling on Muslims "to stand up to those who use Islam to advance their own personal agenda."

Ali, one of the most famous Muslims in the world, issued a statement saying, "True Muslims know that the ruthless violence of so-called Islamic Jihadists goes against the very tenets of our religion."

He added, "I believe that our political leaders should use their position to bring understanding about the religion of Islam and clarify that these misguided murderers have perverted people's views on what Islam really is."

Ali's statement Wednesday was directed at "presidential candidates proposing to ban Muslim immigration to the United States."

"They have alienated many from learning about Islam," Ali wrote.

Boxing great Muhammad Ali. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

U.S. President Barack Obama, in an address to the nation Sunday, called on Americans to reject discrimination, saying, "Muslim Americans are our friends and our neighbours, our co-workers, our sports heroes."

On Twitter early Monday, Trump asked, "What sport is he talking about, and who?" — even though Trump has met Ali several times, and even received an award named after the former heavyweight champion in 2007.

> **Misguided murderers have perverted people's views on what Islam really is.**
> Muhammad Ali

The 73-year-old Ali, who was born Cassius Clay, converted to Islam and changed his name in 1964.

Also on Wednesday, Detroit Lions running back Ameer Abdullah, who is Muslim, spoke with reporters about Trump's proposal.

"I just encourage everyone to educate yourself before you take a stance on something that you may not really know about," Abdullah said. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BACKLASH

Fears of harassment against Muslims across U.S. increase

A severed pig's head was left outside a mosque in Philadelphia.

An Islamic centre in Florida was defaced. A Sikh temple in California was vandalized by someone who mistook it for a mosque and left graffiti that included a profane reference to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) militant group.

Advocacy groups believe a spate of anti-Muslim incidents across the U.S. in recent weeks can be linked to last week's mass shooting in California and the inflammatory rhetoric of Donald Trump and other Republican presidential candidates. And they say Muslims are fearful the backlash could lead to further harassment and violence.

"The spike began with the Paris attacks and has intensified with what happened in San Bernardino and now with what Donald Trump is proposing," Ibrahim Hooper, lead spokesman for the Council on American-Islamic Relations, said Wednesday.

"I have never seen such fear and apprehension in the Muslim community, even after 9/11," Hooper added.

The Anti-Defamation League, relying partly on complaints and partly on media reports, said it has logged more than three dozen incidents since the Nov. 13 terror attacks in Paris that left 130 dead. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

INCIDENTS

Problem hard to measure

It's tough to measure the extent of the problem or to know for sure if there has been an increase in anti-Muslim incidents or if people are simply paying closer attention to a small but steady stream of episodes throughout the year.

The FBI, which keeps statistics on hate crimes committed in the U.S., counted 154 bias offences against Muslims last year. Data for 2015 is unavailable. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

U.S. presidential candidate Donald Trump speaks in Columbus, Ohio. He has said he shelved a trip to Israel in order to not pressure President Benjamin Netanyahu. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE

Trump postpones journey to Israel

UNITED STATES

Candidate says he'll make trip 'after I become president'

Republican Donald Trump has scrapped a planned trip to Israel, saying he will reschedule "at a later date after I become President of the U.S."

Trump tweeted Thursday that he is postponing the trip, which had become problematic for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Viewed as a Republican Party supporter, Netanyahu's position became risky after Trump called for keeping Muslims from entering the U.S. and making controversial comments to a Jewish group.

Trump told Fox News there were many reasons he decided to hold off on a trip, among them that he didn't want to put Netanyahu in a bind.

"You know, he said, 'We have a meeting,' and he looks forward to the meeting and all of that," Trump said. "But I didn't want to put him under pressure, No. 1. I also did it because I'm in the midst of a very powerful campaign that's going very well and it was not that easy to do. So I would say lots of different reasons."

Trump has the Republican party in turmoil over his call for a temporary ban on Muslims entering the U.S. following last week's mass shooting by an Islamic militant couple that killed 14 people in San Bernardino, Calif.

> **I'm in the midst of a very powerful campaign that's going very well.** Donald Trump

Netanyahu's office had said in a statement issued Wednesday he rejects Trump's comments about Muslims but planned to move forward with the meeting with Trump.

The Republican presidential candidate, who has maintained a wide lead in most early polling, sparked criticism among many American Jews last week after speaking to a gathering of Jewish donors. He was booed after refusing to endorse Jerusalem as the undivided capital of Israel. The U.S., like most of the international community, refuses to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital and says the city's status must be resolved in talks between Israel and the Palestinians. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

FACEBOOK

Zuckerberg offers support to fearful

Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg is offering words of support for Muslims who fear retaliation for the recent violent attacks by Islamic extremists in Paris and San Bernardino, Calif.

In the wake of those attacks, Zuckerberg wrote on his personal Facebook page Wednesday that he wants to assure Muslims they are welcome on Facebook and that "we will fight to protect your rights and create a peaceful and safe environment for you."

Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump has proposed barring all Muslims from entering the United States. Other political leaders have condemned Trump's proposal as discriminatory.

Zuckerberg did not refer specifically to any proposal, but the co-founder of the world's biggest social network said, "As a Jew, my parents taught me that we must stand up against attacks on all communities." THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Jailed blogger on hunger strike

FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Canada and family aiming for his release

Ensaf Haidar, wife of blogger Raif Badawi THE CANADIAN PRESS

Saudi blogger Raif Badawi, who was sentenced to receive 1,000 lashes for his liberal writings, has started a hunger strike after being transferred to a remote prison, his wife has announced.

In a post on her Facebook page, Ensaf Haidar said that her husband's hopes of a pardon have been dashed because Shabbat Central Prison, where he was taken Thursday, is reserved for those prisoners who have received a final verdict.

"We are very alarmed at the prison administration decision to transfer my husband to the Shabbat Central and fear it may lead to the resumption of his flogging," wrote Haidar, who lives with the couple's three kids in Sherbrooke, Que.

"We hold the prison administration responsible for any harm that Raif may suffer."

Badawi's supporters have been pushing for a review of his case, buoyed by Quebec's offer of an immigration certificate in June and word from the Saudi supreme court that it was reviewing his case.

Last month, Swiss Foreign Minister Yves Rossier announced that negotiations for Badawi's pardon were in the works.

Badawi, the founder of a Saudi liberal blog, was arrested in 2012 and sentenced to 1,000 lashes, 10 years in prison and a fine of more than $325,000 for insulting religious authorities. Badawi received the first 50 lashes on Jan. 9 in Jeddah, but his punishment has since been postponed indefinitely.

A collection of Badawi's writings, 1,000 Lashes, has been published in Quebec and in October, the European Union awarded him the prestigious Sakharov Prize for human rights. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

THE MISSING HUMAN RIGHTS PROTEST Relatives of people who have gone missing sit at a protest to mark International Human Rights Day in Srinagar, India, Thursday. According to Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP), more than 8,000 are untraceable since the beginning of the Kashmir conflict in 1989, after being arrested by Indian security forces and other security agencies. DAR YASIN/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Shelters for children planned

Federal officials plan to open three shelters in Texas and California to accommodate up to 1,400 unaccompanied immigrant children as the number of people crossing from Mexico into the United States continues to rise.

After a decline in crossings following last year's surge of children entering the United States, border crossings rose again this summer. In October and November, 10,588 unaccompanied children have crossed the U.S.-Mexico border, according to the federal Border Patrol. That's more than double the number for October and November last year.

The increase led the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to expand the number of beds it has for children, the agency said in a statement Thursday.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Offer(s) available on select new 2015/2016 models through participating dealers to qualified retail customers who take delivery from December 1, 2015 to January 4, 2016. Dealers may sell or lease for less. Some conditions apply. See dealer for complete details. Vehicles shown may include optional accessories and upgrades available at extra cost. All offers are subject to change without notice. All pricing and payments include delivery and destination fees up to $1,715, $1 OMVIC fee, $20 tire fee, and $100 A/C charge (where applicable). Excludes other taxes, licensing, PPSA, registration, insurance, variable dealer administration fees, fuel-fill charges up to $100, and down payment (if applicable and unless otherwise specified). Other lease and financing options also available. *0% financing for up to 84 months or up to $7,000 discount available on other select 2015 models. Discount is deducted from the negotiated purchase/lease price before taxes. Maximum $7,000 discount ($6,000 cash discounts and $1,000 ECO-Credit) is offered on 2015 Optima Hybrid LX (OP744F) only. $1,000 ECO-Credit is offered on all 2016 Optima Hybrid models. Certain conditions apply. See your dealer for complete details. **Representative Financing Example:** Financing offer available on approved credit (OAC), on a new 2016 Rio LX MT (RO54JG) with a selling price of $15,864 is based on monthly payments of $177 for 84 months at 0% with a $0 down payment and first monthly payment due at finance inception. Offer also includes $1,000 discount (loan credit). Other taxes, registration, insurance and licensing fees are excluded. **"Don't Pay For 90 Days" on all models (90-day payment deferral) applies to purchase financing offers on all new 2015/2016 models on approved credit. No interest will accrue during the first 60 days of the finance contract. After this period, interest starts to accrue and the purchaser will repay the principal interest monthly over the term of the contract. Offer ends January 4, 2016. ***Cash Purchase Price** for the new 2015 Optima LX AT (OP742F)/2015 Optima Hybrid LX (OP744F) is $20,964/$24,764 and includes a cash discount of $5,500/$7,000 including $6,000 cash discounts and $1,000 ECO-Credit. Dealer may sell for less. Other taxes, registration, insurance and licensing fees are excluded. Cash discounts vary by model and trim and are deducted from the negotiated selling price before taxes. **Representative Leasing Example:** Lease offer available on approved credit (OAC), on the 2016 Forte Sedan LX MT (YD54FJ)/2016 Soul LX MT (SJ55JG) with a selling price of $17,564/$18,944 is based on monthly payments of $148/$194 for 60/36 months at 0%/0.9%, with $0 security deposit, $1,300/$0 discounts (lease credit), $750/$1,000 down payment and first monthly payment due at lease inception. Total lease obligation $8,815/$6,999 with the option to purchase at the end of the term for $6,666/$10,346. Lease has 16,000 km/yr allowance (other packages available and $0.12/km for excess kilometres). ΩOpen to Canadian residents who have reached the age of majority in their province or territory of residence who take a test drive at a Canadian Kia dealership between November 1, 2015 and January 4, 2016. 10 weekly prizes of a $1,000 travel/2000 voucher available. Plus one $100 travel voucher per eligible test drive. Limit of one entry/test drive voucher per person. No purchase necessary. Skill testing question required. Some conditions apply. Go to Kia.ca for complete details. ^Lease payments must be made on a monthly or bi-weekly basis but cannot be made on a weekly basis. Weekly lease payments are for advertising purposes only. †Model shown Manufacturer Suggested Retail Price for 2016 Forte SX AT (FD748G)/2016 Soul SX Luxury (SJ75RG)/2015 Optima SX AT Turbo (OP748F) is $26,695/$27,495/$34,895. The 2015 Optima was awarded the 2015 Top Safety Pick by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) for model year 2015. U.S. models tested. Visit www.iihs.org for full details. The Kia Soul received the lowest number of problems per 100 vehicles among compact multi-purpose vehicles in the proprietary J.D. Power 2015 U.S. Initial Quality Study®. Study based on responses from 84,367 U.S. new-vehicle owners, measuring 244 models and measures opinions after 90 days of ownership. Proprietary study results are based on experiences and perceptions of U.S. owners surveyed from February to May 2015. Your experiences may vary. Visit jdpower.com. Government 5-Star Safety Ratings are part of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's (NHTSA's) New Car Assessment Program (www.SaferCar.gov). Information in this advertisement is believed to be accurate at the time of printing. For more information on our 5-year warranty coverage, visit kia.ca or call us at 1-877-542-2886. Kia is a trademark of Kia Motors Corporation. Ask Dealer for Details. Customers pay Tax on Trips.

FINANCIAL KNOWLEDGE

Investments spook millennials: Poll

A new poll suggests that two-thirds of millennials are investing their money, but that most feel they don't have adequate knowledge for the task.

The poll done for CIBC found 67 per cent of Canadians aged 18 to 34 reported having investments including stocks, GICs, bonds and mutual funds.

However, 82 per cent said they didn't know enough about investing.

Meanwhile, the one-third of respondents who said they did not have any investments cited lack of financial knowledge and the fact that investing "intimidates" them as major reasons.

Not having any money to invest and other financial priorities were also cited as reasons for not investing.

Of those who do invest, 41 per cent said they don't get the returns they expect, while 28 per cent found it hard to develop a long-term strategy.

Sarah Widmeyer, head of wealth advisory services at CIBC, says while it's good to see millennials recognize the importance of investing, they need help. "Their lack of knowledge is making them vulnerable to many common investing mistakes," Widmeyer says.

> **Their lack of knowledge is making them vulnerable to many common investing mistakes.**
> Sarah Widmeyer, head of wealth advisory services at CIBC

The online survey done between Nov. 24 and Dec. 8 included 1,004 Canadians ages 18-34 who are Angus Reid Forum panellists.

The Marketing Research and Intelligence Association, the polling industry's professional body, says online surveys cannot be assigned a margin of error due to their lack of random sampling.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Walmart has begun testing its own mobile payment system that will allow shoppers to pay with any major credit or debit card or its own store gift card at the cash register. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Walmart steps into mobile payment war

TECHNOLOGY

Retailer going up against Apple, Google and Samsung

Walmart, the world's largest retailer, said it's launching its own mobile payment system that will allow shoppers to pay with any major credit or debit card or its own store gift card through its existing smartphone app at the cash register.

It started testing the new payment feature Thursday at its stores in the Bentonville, Arkansas area, where the retailer is based. It plans to launch the payment system called Walmart Pay in all 4,500-plus U.S. stores early next year.

It's part of Walmart's overall mobile strategy to making shopping easier and faster, but the launch is the latest salvo in the battle for mobile payments that's in the early stages. Walmart has moved into the field as Apple's one-year-old tap-and-pay system is being expanded to other merchants like Best Buy and KFC, and several months after Google launched the Android Pay mobile wallet app and Samsung came out with Samsung Pay. They're all trying to get a piece of what could be a very lucrative business, but none of them have cracked the market so far.

The move signals that Walmart believes it's best to build its own system. "We are creating a seamless shopping experience that includes payment," Neil Ashe, president and CEO of Walmart's global eCommerce, told reporters. "It's fast. It's simple, and it's a secure way for customers to use their smartphone."

> **It's fast. It's simple, and it's a secure way for customers to use their smartphone.**
> Neil Ashe

Walmart executives said that after evaluating various mobile options, they found that they had different constraints, working only on certain devices or payment types. Apple Pay requires iPhones. But Google's own tap-and-pay services, Android Pay and Samsung's Samsung Pay require Android phones.

Walmart's move could be a blow to Merchant Customer Exchange, or MCX, set up a few years ago by a consortium of retailers and restaurants to create an industrywide mobile payment system. Walmart has been a key player. But Walmart executives told reporters they remain excited about the MCX pilot program for the payment system called "CurrentC."

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

IN BRIEF

Drones wars coming to TV game show near you

DHX Media has been commissioned to co-produce and distribute two seasons of a new series called Airmageddon, a skill-testing competition pitting remote-controlled flying drones against each other. The series was created by Steve Carsey, who did Robot Wars, a game show that BBC ran from 1998 to 2004. Halifax-based DHX will broadcast the program in Canada starting in spring.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

market minute

DOLLAR
73.36¢ (–0.36¢)

TSX
13,016.59 (+79.00)

OIL
$36.76 US (–40¢)

GOLD
$1,072.00 US (–$4.50)

NATURAL GAS: $2.015 US (–4.7¢)
DOW JONES: 17,574.75 (+82.45)

FOOD

El Niño threatening Canada's maple output this spring

A late spring caused Canada's maple syrup production to fall for the second consecutive year in 2015 — and El Nino is threatening to put a dent in next spring's output as well.

The warmer El Nino weather is expected to have an impact on a number of commodities, including maple sap, said Sylvain Charlebois, professor of distribution and food policy at the University of Guelph's Food Institute.

"I see little evidence that would encourage anyone to see a good year in 2016," he said in an interview.

> **I see little evidence that would encourage anyone to see a good year in 2016,**
> Sylvain Charlebois

The impact would hit Quebec, the world's dominant maple syrup producer, along with Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and syrup-producing American states like Vermont and New York.

Producers on both sides of the border aren't yet ready, however, to throw in the towel.

The Federation of Quebec Maple Syrup Producers says it's too soon to know what impact warmer conditions could have next spring.

"Nobody can predict the production of each year," said federation deputy director Paul Rouillard.

He also doubts that weather poses a long-term problem for Quebec, because colder parts of the province could — over several decades — pick up the slack from more affected regions. Quebec's federation, representing about 7,300 producers, is seeking approval to add 2.5 million taps to the 43 million already active each year.

Quebec's supply management system keeps syrup prices high by using its strategic reserve — which contains 60 million pounds — to balance production fluctuations.

A shorter season also affected U.S. maple production last year but it's premature to forecast weather problems several months ahead, said Matthew Gordon, executive director of the Vermont Maple Sugar Makers Association.

Gordon said although El Nino affects winter weather, it tends to have less impact on spring's oscillating temperatures of freezing nights and thawing days that are crucial for maple production.

Canadian maple production decreased 6.1 per cent to 8.9 million gallons last season, said Statistics Canada. The value of maple production was $358 million, down from $380 million in 2014 and the $408 million peak in 2013.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Maple production decreased 6.1 per cent last season. ISTOCK

metro VIEWS
Your essential daily news
Weekend, December 11-13, 2015

DEENA DOUARA KARIM: ON TRUMP'S DANGEROUS WORDS

I'm weary of trying to convince people of things. That Islamophobia is prevalent and experienced by people I love. Or that what's happening today has little to do with religion.

You know how I feel about Donald Trump.

I'm a Muslim and an American, and you know how I feel about Trump.

I sat in the newsroom as he made his comments about banning Muslims from coming into the U.S. Someone referenced Hitler, it was slotted for a news page (in Toronto, a brief) and we all went about our work.

Meanwhile, I stared at the screen. Is it naïve to continue to feel disbelief when every outrageous statement is only incrementally more horrid than the one before?

I'm weary of trying to convince people of things. That Islamophobia is prevalent and experienced by people I love. Or that what's happening today has little to do with religion.

Instead, I'll tell you how it feels to hear Trump — a front-running candidate to lead the world's most powerful country — say he wants a "total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States." How it feels to hear supporters say "send them all back."

You know how I feel, but I hope you'll still hear me say it.

It feels like anger. Anger at the lies Trump knowingly spews that leave Muslims as casualties in very real ways,

It feels like fear. Not fear I'll be patching crescents onto my coats anytime soon, but I do fear for the soul of the country I grew up in.

Dark times. Donald Trump's message is designed to provoke, but it provokes pain for many who deserve better from America, Deena Douara Karim argues. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

at home and abroad. Anger at the blatantly false information that will shape how Americans — and Canadians, too — view their co-workers and their neighbours. "I watched thousands and thousands of people cheering," he says, of reactions to 9/11 in New Jersey — a claim supported by nothing and no one. Suggestions — a Muslim registry, ID cards — that push the boundaries of what can be thought and vocalized. And anger at the muted response. Calls here and there to remove his name from a building, to be sure. But visceral outrage? For words that so closely parallel Hitler for a population with still-living links? I have to turn to Facebook for that.

It feels like sadness. Like a friend, who was a refugee, hearing "ship them all back" from a Trump supporter. Would they send her family back, whatever the horror "back" represents? "I don't want them here," they say. "They need to go." Sadness because I suspect I have school friends who would now nod their heads, agreeing their families really would be safer this way. With sadness I recall the humour and generosity of Syrians I met years ago – the young hostel owners who shared their food, the man who talked about films as I bought cloth from him. Sad to hear them now compared to "rabid dogs," by another candidate, Ben Carson, and know they would have showered him with the same kindness.

It feels like fear. Not fear I'll be patching crescents onto my coats anytime soon, but I do fear for the soul of the country I grew up in. What are we capable of when Trump calls waterboarding "peanuts"? Fear that people selling "anti-jihad" rifles who distribute Qur'ans for target practice will move into the mainstream, acknowledged and accepted in this "anti-political-correctness" ethos.

It feels like worry. Like hearing friends select baby names based on their sounding not-too-Muslimy. Worry for how refugees — from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq — will be received and what future awaits them when many in the world's wealthiest nation see them as ticking time bombs.

It feels like bafflement. How the very people who accept thousands of casualties from guns will take all measures to brace against a single death by "Muslim." Gun-rights principles above all, but no principles that stand by people like me.

It feels like frustration. Hearing experts agree that inflammatory rhetoric leads to greater isolation and radicalization in dark and vulnerable corners at home, and emboldens groups like ISIL abroad, meaning that Trump and his compatriots help create the world they purport to combat. Frustration because high-profile comments give people permission to express their nastiest inclinations. Frustration with the lack of transparency around mass killings when they are perpetrated by Muslims — who always wind up dead, and who always inspire alternate stories, "conspiracy theories," difficult to ignore.

There is no need to reassure me Trump will not win the presidency, or that a registry system would never pass. It does not matter. Trump is no lone loon — he has support and admiration; has other candidates seething that he's captured the hate vote.

The statements that evoke these feelings are harmful, now. They have repercussions, now. And they change the America that I grew up in, now.

Deena Douara Karim is a journalist and photographer. She tweets at @Deena_Do.

ROSEMARY WESTWOOD

metroview

For a joyful New Year's prediction, just talk to Tomson Highway

Tomson Highway's aura is infectious. His grin. His self-described "spectacular joy."

"I have a mental condition that is worsening as I get older. It's called ridiculousness," he says right after we meet, looking thoroughly pleased. For the next 10 minutes every answer contains a punchline.

"Shall we disrobe?" he asks playfully, taking off his oversized track jacket. He wears square glasses and a black tuque that he pushes up over his ears as we talk.

The acclaimed playwright, novelist and pianist is in Toronto for a cabaret retrospective of his work, Songs In The Key of Cree, on Sunday. Highway, a classically trained pianist, has been writing songs for 14 years, the kind that, at a recent run in Saskatoon, garner standing ovations so great even "People in wheelchairs leaped from their wheelchairs!"

"Language is music," he says — one of his oft-repeated lines, and notes I've been laughing in 4/4 time.

Highway speaks Cree, French and English among others, and travels extensively "for the beautiful people" and the languages.

He's called himself a linguistic activist, and argues each language contains "a secret to the functioning of the human organism." Learning a new tongue offers insight, he says, and that chance to truly listen.

I ask him about Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who won praise this week for his new attitude to indigenous Canadians.

"Yes, he's opening his mind and his heart, and he's listening," says Highway. Compared to Stephen Harper, who had a "heart of ice" and spoke only of the economy, Trudeau is "talking about human issues, issues that matter to humanity. That means there's room for change," he says.

And Highway sees Canada's Aboriginal Peoples on the precipice of great change. He believes pain and trauma are the birthplace of beauty and creativity. From manure, as he puts it, comes vegetation.

"I think we're on the verge of something extraordinary as native people. Collectively as a nation, we have suffered a certain kind of trauma, which brings us to the threshold of extraordinary achievement. That's what I'm here to help with, to help open to the door to extraordinary achievement, and I think it's going to be spectacular."

I tell him that's the best prediction for the new year I've ever heard.

Highway — who speaks far too quickly for note-taking — seems like he could philosophize like this forever, but nothing serious can ward off his humour. He makes a joke about flattery and flatulence as we shake hands goodbye.

"Every moment of every day should be an act of joy," he says. "I dance down the street."

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metro WEEKEND
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MOVIES MUSIC TELEVISION DIGITAL

A whale of a tale... hold the fat

Chris Hemsworth isn't the only actor to change his weight for a role, but the practice can take its toll on the body. HANDOUT

IN THE HEART OF THE SEA

Hemsworth lost 33 pounds to play sailor

Richard Crouse
For Metro Canada

In the Heart of the Sea features less of Chris Hemsworth than we've seen on screen before. He's in virtually every scene, but for much of the film the usually bulked up Thor star is set adrift in a raft, starving and physically much less imposing than usual.

The movie is an old-fashioned whale of a tale. Literally.

Based on the true story said to have inspired Moby Dick, it's about whalers battling not only repeated assaults from the one whale who fought back, but also malnourishment and dehydration.

At sea for three months in tiny whaleboats the men are pushed to the edge of sanity, taking drastic steps to survive.

To convincingly play a starving sailor Hemsworth trimmed 33 pounds off his already toned 6'2 3/4" frame.

"My crazy diet would make you pass out from exhaustion," he said. At certain points he was eating just 500 or 600 calories — that's less than a combo lunch meal at most fast-food places — in the form of a boiled egg, two crackers and a celery stick a day.

Hemsworth and his underfed cast mates passed away the time with conversations "about our favourite foods and what we would eat when we finished the film."

The actor says losing that amount of weight isn't something he'd like to do again, but adds, "by those final sequences when we were supposed to be exhausted and emotional. We were feeling that way off screen too, so it helped."

Dramatic weight loss isn't new — actors have been yo-yo dieting for roles for years — but doctors say rapid body mass reduction can lead to malnutrition, maladies like gallstones and worse. In other words, as Christian Bale who dumped 60 pounds for his role in The Machinist says, "It ain't great for your health."

Still, actors take on dramatic diets to aid in their dramatic work. Anne Hathaway dropped 25 pounds by food deprivation and exercise to make Les Miserables while Matthew McConaughey survived eating only Diet Coke, egg whites and a piece of chicken a day to play AIDS patient Ron Woodroof in Dallas Buyers Club. According to The Playlist he stopped dieting when "people stopped asking if he was all right and started suggesting he seek help."

Just as common are actors who gain weight. Russell Crowe gained 63 pounds to play a CIA bigwig in Body of Lies, George Clooney gained 35 pounds for Syriana and Renee Zellweger gained 30 pounds for Bridget Jones's Diary, lost it, only to regain it for the sequel.

Jared Leto who lost 40 pounds to play Rayon in Dallas Buyer's Club, gained 67 pounds for the film Chapter 27 by drinking melted pints of chocolate Haagen Dazs ice cream mixed with olive oil and soy sauce "to get me bloated even more."

Why do actors alter their bodies? Some call it dedication while cynics suggest it's an easy Oscar. Physical transformations (plus acting talent) brought Robert DeNiro, Charlize Theron and McConaughey to the winner's circle.

But some actors have sworn off manipulating their weight. Jim Carrey turned down a role in the Three Stooges biopic that would have required him to gain 40 to 50 pounds and Tom Hanks blames gaining and losing weight for roles with him developing Type 2 diabetes.

"I've talked to a number of actors who have gained weight for roles and — just out of the sheer physical toll on one's knees and shoulders — no-one wants to do it again," he told the BBC.

MOVIE RATINGS by Richard Crouse

In the Heart of the Sea ★★★	**HOW RATING WORKS**
The Danish Girl ★★★	★★★★ SEE IT
Carol ★★★★	★★★ WORTHWHILE
Youth ★★★★	★★ UP TO YOU
	★ SKIP IT

Chris Hemsworth and Charlotte Riley in the action adventure In the Heart of the Sea. CONTRIBUTED

Inside the heart of Chris Hemsworth

INTERVIEW

Actor talks fame, Thor and working with Ron Howard

Hosting Saturday Night Live earlier this year, Chris Hemsworth exaggerated his swift ascent in Hollywood: "If a jacked Australian with a perfect face can make it, anyone can," he said in a mock American Express ad.

Hemsworth, the 32-year-old Australian actor known the world over as Thor, appears as if perfectly chiseled out of movie star granite. But whatever his considerable natural gifts, Hemsworth has proven an interesting actor inclined to use his powerful screen presence in roles that both exalt it and upend it.

In In the Heart of the Sea, which opens Friday, he reteams with Ron Howard, who directed him in Rush, the 2013 movie that yielded Hemsworth's most confident starring performance as the Formula One driver James Hunt.

In Heart of the Sea, a recounting of the plight of the Essex (the cursed whaling ship that inspired Herman Melville's Moby-Dick), Hemsworth plays the swashbuckling first mate. Shipwrecked by a mammoth sperm whale, Hemsworth's heroic seaman is humbled, left a gaunt survivor.

It's the kind of duality that defines Hemsworth: a hunk but a family man (he has three kids); an Avengers superhero but a talented comic actor. Along with his shirtless cameo in Vacation and playing the receptionist in the upcoming Ghostbusters, he hosts SNL again on Saturday.

In a recent interview, Hemsworth discussed his new film, the box-office disappointment Blackhat and the stresses of being a Norse god.

Do you ever feel any pressure to live up to Thor?
You feel like you've tricked everyone successfully. I never felt big enough playing Thor. And then people talk about you like you're nine-foot tall and 800 pounds. I'm well aware of the illusion. There's not a second where I go: Yeah, I'm a god.

Are you aware there's another Thor in New York right now? It's the nickname of the hard-throwing New York Mets pitcher Noah Syndergaard.
(Laughs) I'll look him up! I think he's far more godlike than me.

The best scene of Thor must have been when Thor tries coffee for the first time, slams it on the floor and demands another.
It's funny, that's probably closer to me than the serious, gladiatorial-type Thor. I'd rather have fun with it. It comes easier. When doing Thor, those scenes where he (lowers voice) spoke like this and everything was grand and big, people thought: That's what he is. Saturday Night Live and Vacation, as well, are good opportunities to go: Actually it's not.

What was your experience on Michael Mann's cybercrime thriller Blackhat, which some critics defended but which flopped at the box office?
Really hard, actually. I love Michael and it was great. But I do wish I had done more of what I truly wanted to do. I remember being so in awe of him that I said I would just do anything he said, regardless of whether I agreed with it. And that's a real danger because someone hires you because they want to you bring what you're going to bring to the table. I was just so in awe of Michael Mann that I went, "Yep, cool. Wherever you want me." So I don't feel like it was my performance so much. And that wasn't the fault of Michael Mann.

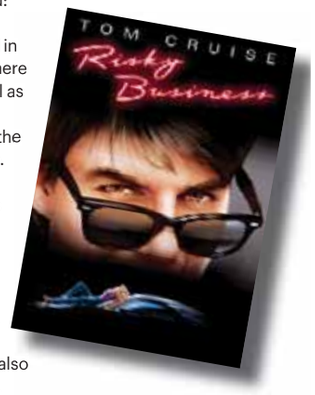
You and Howard, however, seem to be a good team.
I can't speak for him but for me (Rush) was the first time I felt I was truly in an environment where I could just take risks and explore. Something felt sort of pure about that experience. And it was probably the role, too, something I directly related to or liked about that character. Full of insecurity and fear but also cockiness and overconfidence. It was all these contradictory things.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW: TOM CRUISE?

In his prime, Tom Cruise was the ultimate in cool: one of the biggest heartthrobs in Hollywood who helped a certain sunglasses company sell millions of pairs just by wearing them... and wearing them well. That's carried him through an amazing four decades of success. From his breakout performance in the 1980s dark comedy Risky Business (playing this month on Hollywood Suite) to more recent turns in thrillers like the Mission: Impossible series, Cruise has had an unparalleled run of box office hits over the years.

Take a look back at Tom Cruise during his rise to fame with some facts that might surprise you:



- Cruise and his family lived in Ottawa from 1971 to 1974 (where he attended the same school as Bryan Adams!). His dad — an engineer — was working for the Canadian military at the time.
- The iconic Risky Business underwear dance scene was improvised — the script said only, "Joel dances in underwear through the house."
- Cruise earned his pilot's license in Markham, Ontario, during the filming of Top Gun — a movie for which he also learned to ride a motorcycle.
- Cruise was almost cast to play Kevin Bacon's part in Footloose (1984), but had to back out because of scheduling conflicts.
- He was the first actor to star in both the Oscar winner for Best Picture, Rain Man (1988) and the Razzie "winner" for Worst Picture, Cocktail (1988), in the same year.
- The Disney character Aladdin (1992) was modelled on Tom Cruise's good looks.

Rediscover Tom Cruise's rise to Hollywood powerhouse through the '80s and '90s. Starting Dec. 8 and running until Jan. 12, Hollywood Suite is offering a free preview of uncut and commercial-free movies that shaped the '70s, '80s, '90s and 2000s. Available on television service providers across the country, this free preview includes access to Hollywood Suite On Demand, where available. Featured films include Risky Business and such Cruise classics as Days of Thunder (1990), A Few Good Men (1992), The Firm (1993), and Mission: Impossible (1996).

HOLLYWOODSUITE

70s movies 80s movies 90s movies 00s movies

STAR METRO Content Solutions

Now playing

DRAMA/ROMANCE

Carol

Director: Todd Haynes
Starring: Kyle Chandler, Cate Blanchett

A young woman in her 20s, Therese Belivet is a clerk working in a Manhattan department store and dreaming of a more fulfilling life when she meets Carol, an alluring woman trapped in a loveless, convenient marriage. As an immediate connection sparks between them.

ROTTEN TOMATOES™ SCORE
Critics: 94% Audience: 84%

ART HOUSE/INTERNATIONAL

Every Thing Will Be Fine

Director: Wim Wenders
Starring: James Franco, Charlotte Gainsbourg

This searing drama charts the emotional odyssey of a struggling novelist whose life is turned upside down one wintry night following a fatal car accident. The incident sets him on a soul-searching journey toward redemption.

ROTTEN TOMATOES™ SCORE
Critics: 15% Audience: 21%

ART HOUSE/INTERNATIONAL

Macbeth

Director: Justin Kurzel
Starring: Michael Fassbender, Marion Cotillard

Macbeth is the story of a fearless warrior and inspiring leader brought low by ambition and desire. A thrilling interpretation of the dramatic realities of the times and a reimagining of what wartime must have been like for one of literature's most famous and compelling characters.

ROTTEN TOMATOES™ SCORE
Critics: 82% Audience: 70%

DRAMA

The Danish Girl

Director: Tom Hooper
Starring: Alicia Vikander, Amber Heard, Eddie Redmayne

The remarkable love story inspired by the lives of artists Lili Elbe and Gerda Wegener. Lili and Gerda's marriage and work evolve as they navigate Lili's groundbreaking journey as a transgender pioneer.

ROTTEN TOMATOES™ SCORE
Critics: 73% Audience: 70%

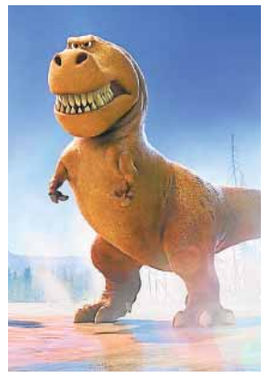
COMEDY

Don Verdean

Director: Jared Hess
Starring: Sam Rockwell, Amy Ryan

Hired by an ambitious small-town pastor to find sacred relics in the Holy Land, a self-proclaimed Biblical archaeologist comes up short and his attempt to cover up his failure fuels a comic conspiracy from the filmmaking team behind Napoleon Dynamite and Nacho Libre.

ROTTEN TOMATOES™ SCORE
Critics: 50% Audience: 40%



ANIMATION

The Good Dinosaur

Director: Peter Sohn
Starring: Raymond Ochoa, Jeffrey Wright

What if the cataclysmic asteroid that forever changed life on Earth actually missed the planet completely and giant dinosaurs never became extinct?

ROTTEN TOMATOES™ SCORE
Critics: 81% Audience: 81%

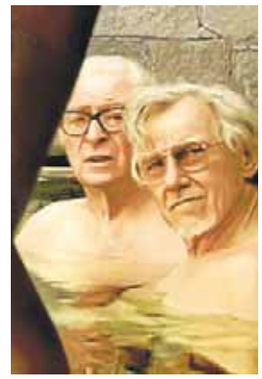
DRAMA

In The Heart of the Sea

Director: Ron Howard
Starring: Chris Hemsworth, Benjamin Walker

In the winter of 1820, the New England whaling ship Essex was assaulted by something no one could believe: a whale of mammoth size and will. The real-life disaster would inspire Herman Melville's Moby-Dick.

ROTTEN TOMATOES™ SCORE
Critics: 60% Audience: 70%



COMEDY

Youth

Director: Paolo Sorrentino
Starring: Michael Caine, Harvey Keitel

Youth is about two longtime friends vacationing in the Swiss Alps. Oscar winning actor Michael Caine plays Fred, an acclaimed composer and conductor, who brings along his daughter (Rachel Weisz) and best friend Mick (Harvey Keitel), a renowned filmmaker.

ROTTEN TOMATOES™ SCORE
Critics: 73% Audience: 76%

Their lives. Unpaused.

SickKids

FILM BRIEF

Damon to speak at MIT where he played a janitor

Matt Damon shot to fame in the 1997 movie Good Will Hunting as a gifted janitor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Now, he has been selected to deliver the university's 2016 commencement address.

MIT announced Thursday that the Academy Award-winning actor, filmmaker, social activist and Cambridge native will address graduates on June 3.

Damon said in a statement that it's an honour to be named commencement speaker "at a school that I couldn't have gotten into."

MIT President L. Rafael Reif says Damon has "made us think about our world in new ways, and through his service, he has made it a better place."

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Matt Damon
GETTY IMAGES

THE TV DINNER JESSICA ALLEN

"I think In the Heart of the Sea is the only book that gave me actual nightmares"

Director Ron Howard's In the Heart of the Sea is the latest reimagining of the 1820 sinking of the American whaling ship Essex. After a sperm whale attack destroyed their vessel, 20 sailors were shipwrecked at sea thousands of miles off the coast of South America. Only eight men survived, partly on account of cannibalizing those who didn't.

Chris Hemsworth plays Owen Chase, the Essex's first mate who wrote a book in 1821 about the ship's horrifying final voyage. That book provided inspiration for Herman Melville's Moby-Dick in 1851. Meanwhile, Nathaniel Philbrick read both Chase and Melville and published In the Heart of the Sea in 2000, which Howard has now turned into a movie, which you can see starting Friday.

"Don't you remember how terrifying it was?" Simon recently asked of Philbrick's acclaimed bestseller. "I think it's the only book that gave me actual nightmares."

"I read it?"

"We both read it," he reminded me, "in Newfoundland."

That was 10 years ago. I had planned for months to go live by myself in a tiny outport called Grand Bruit, where my dad owned a house. Although I'd never published a single word, I was going to write a novel. A few months before I left Toronto I made another leviathan leap: although we'd only been dating for about eight months, I asked Simon to come with me.

Imagine this: no cars, no roads, a general store, a church, a school, which two 12-year-olds attended, and some 30 permanent residents. We arrived in autumn and stayed through the winter. When we ice-skated on the endless network of frozen ponds nestled high up in the tuckamore-covered hills, it felt like we lived in a snow globe. Everywhere we looked — towards the ocean, the mountains, the cheerfully coloured saltbox houses — was picture-perfect. If only Instagram had existed.

THE MOVIE: In the Heart of the Sea

THE MEAL: Cod au gratin

And we read. The book that I most associate with Grand Bruit is Moby-Dick. I don't think that's entirely on account of it being the great American novel. It was the time — I was just about to turn 30 — and the place: sitting at night in front of the old Franklin stove with the wind whipping so fiercely outside that it felt like the house — which, coincidentally, reminded me of a ship's hull — would blow down.

We also ate: chow chow and copper pennies, partridgeberry pudding and bakeapple cheesecake, cod tongue, boiled vegetables flavoured with salt pork, salt cod flavoured with salt pork, and, my favourite, cod au gratin.

On Sunday night I pulled out my well-worn copy of What's Cooking in Grand Bruit, a collection of recipes compiled by the United Church women's association. There on page 25 was a cod au gratin recipe: make a roux of butter, flour and milk; add onion; pour over fresh cod fillets; top with bread crumbs and grated Cheddar cheese; bake.

It was so simple to make — and satisfying — that I wondered why I haven't made it more often. Maybe because my cod au gratin will never be as memorable as the fine people who made it for us, and cared for us, all those years ago.

And the novel I was supposed to write? In those six glorious months I wrote 12 pages. But boy, did I live.

Jessica Allen is the digital correspondent on CTV's The Social.

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Without a pause

NEW SICKKIDS VIDEO SERIES SHOWS CHILDREN'S LIVES TRANSFORMED

Every year, SickKids shares stories of real patients: kids whose lives are placed on hold while they're treated for serious medical issues. And it's not just the child whose life is affected — the entire family's life comes to a temporary halt as everything but the child's health care is put on pause.

As the Director of the Transplant and Regenerative Medicine Centre, Dr. Rulan Parekh has seen many such cases first-hand. "The simplest things in life that people take care of become more complicated when you have a child who's got end stage organ failure," Parekh says.

This year, SickKids is sharing the stories of six children who received care at the hospital a year ago and whose lives were transformed — "unpaused" — by their treatment. Four of these patients are profiled below. The stories of their recovery are extraordinary, as are the videos that show just how well they're doing merely a year later.

The hospital's current fundraising campaign is built around the notion of "unpausing" patients' lives. The campaign lets visitors to sickkidsfoundation.com/unpause watch videos of the kids before their operations. To "unpause" their stories and see how well they're doing today, readers can contribute online with donations. Their video stories will be fully revealed once a certain number of donors have contributed. Visitors can see how many others have already donated and how close each story is to unpausing.

"To see kids transplanted," Parekh says, "it's really the gift of life."

Help unpause the lives of SickKids patients. Donate today at sickkidsfoundation.com/unpause.

Charlie's Story

FOR THE FIRST FOUR MONTHS OF CHARLIZE (CHARLIE) LEFAVE'S LIFE, SICKKIDS WAS THE ONLY HOME SHE KNEW.

Eighteen weeks before Charlie and her twin sister were born, they were diagnosed as Mono-Mono or MoMo twins. In this rare condition, the twins' umbilical cords can get tangled or compressed.

Charlie was also diagnosed with a heart condition and was sent to the SickKids Fetal Cardiac Program. Approximately 60 per cent of newborns in Ontario with a major cardiac malformation requiring treatment at birth are diagnosed by the program at SickKids.

In April 2014, Charlie's parents, Karen and Greg, moved to Toronto where Karen's pregnancy could be monitored. A month later, the twins were born at 31 weeks' gestation. Charlie was rushed to SickKids.

A 3D model of Charlie's heart was printed so doctors could study the defect while they waited for her to grow strong enough for surgery. SickKids has pioneered a number of techniques for imaging hearts and printing 3D models.

In August 2014, Charlie had her first open-heart surgery. A month later she went home for the first time. She had another major operation in the spring of 2015.

Charlie is monitored every six months at SickKids and the Lefaves always visit the staff who were their support system while they were living far from home.

Kael's story

EIGHT-YEAR-OLD KAEL HAS ONE OF THE FEW RECORDED CASES IN THE WORLD OF AN AUTOIMMUNE DISORDER CALLED STAT 1 MUTATION.

His condition is so rare that he was almost five years old by the time he was diagnosed through genetic testing at SickKids.

His parents, Emily and Andrew, were devastated to learn that Kael was unlikely to live past the age of 12, but they were determined to give their son more time in the hope of finding a cure.

Kael was admitted to SickKids for a bone-marrow transplant in November 2013. In January 2014, he had emergency surgery to remove part of his intestine. Kael was started on intravenous feeds that April. In the summer of 2014 he was treated for fungus in his lungs.

The many complications and the lengthy hospital stay left Kael so weak that he lost his ability to walk. He needed a lot of therapy to regain it.

On his 100th day in hospital, Kael's nurses wrote songs for him and sang them at his bedside. On Kael's 200th day in hospital, his nursing team gave him a book filled with messages from staff, reading "Kael is special because…"

After more than 400 days in isolation at SickKids, Kael is living at home again. He was able to return to school for the first time in September. He's joined a hockey team and is determined to be as active as he can be.

Give the gif

Donate today to see

Unpaused.

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Liam's Story

THE LEFT SIDE OF LIAM'S HEART WAS SO SMALL WHEN HE WAS BORN THAT IT WAS AS THOUGH HE ARRIVED IN THE WORLD WITH HALF A HEART.

The defect was detected while he was still in utero. His mother Katie was seven months pregnant when Liam was diagnosed with severe hypoplastic left heart syndrome (HLHS). HLHS accounts for seven to nine per cent of all heart defects diagnosed within the first year of life. In Liam's case, the condition was extremely severe.

Each year, one baby in 100 is born with a heart defect. More than 21 per cent of them are diagnosed at less than one month old. SickKids performs approximately 85 per cent of all the paediatric cardiovascular surgeries in Ontario.

Liam had his first open-heart surgery at SickKids when he was just four days old. Once, doctors had to bring him back to life. Liam even suffered a stroke.

In the years since Liam's ordeal began, he has had several additional surgeries. Now an active four-year-old, Liam is stable, though doctors continue to monitor his health. He may need more surgery and will likely need a heart transplant one day.

Liam's parents, Katie and Kevin, are deeply grateful for the lifesaving care provided by the doctors at SickKids. "Liam's journey has given us a whole new appreciation for life and for our family," says Katie, who recently gave birth to her third child, a second sister for Liam.

Taylum's story

TAYLUM'S MOTHER, DESIREE, LIKES TO SHARE THE STORY OF HER SON'S MANY ACCOMPLISHMENTS SINCE HIS BIRTH IN THE SPRING OF 2013.

After a routine ultrasound late in her pregnancy showed that Taylum's kidneys were enlarged, the baby was delivered six weeks early. Twelve hours later, Taylum and his dad, Darren, were travelling from their home in Sudbury to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at SickKids.

Taylum was diagnosed with chronic kidney failure. His enlarged kidneys were crushing his lungs and stomach.

At five weeks old, Taylum had one of his kidneys removed so that his other organs could function. Several weeks later, his second kidney also had to be removed. He was placed on dialysis six days a week.

After three and a half months in intensive care and another three and a half months on the kidney ward, Taylum moved with his mother to Ronald McDonald House. From there, Desiree would bring Taylum to SickKids for his hemodialysis treatments.

In May 2015, Taylum had a living-donor kidney transplant. By late August, two-year-old Taylum could go home for the first time. He is still being treated by SickKids.

Only one child in four born with Taylum's condition survives beyond the first month or so, and Desiree marvels at her son's resilience.

"They saved my son's life," Desiree says. "The nurses and doctors at SickKids are different. They are so compassionate and they care for the whole family."

ft that can unpause lives.

e their stories unpaused.

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Their lives. Unpaused.

SickKids

Alicia Vikander was nominated for a Golden Globe award for best actress in a motion picture drama for her role in The Danish Girl. FOCUS FEATURES VIA AP

Learning to let go

INTERVIEW

Vikander talks the emotional journey of a historic couple

Matt Prigge
Metro | New York

Before she read the script, Alicia Vikander says she wasn't aware The Danish Girl had a strong second female role. It's the tale of Lili Elbe (played by Eddie Redmayne), one of the first people, in the 1920s, to transition from male to female. That also meant parting ways with Gerda, her wife from when she was Einar, an esteemed painter. The Ex Machina actress takes the other lead, and she says — speaking to us while making the next Bourne movie — the film explores both a transgender pioneer and what her transition did to her relationship with Gerda, who had to find strength to let her go.

You do a lot of period films, from A Royal Affair to Anna Karenina to Testament of Youth. Do you sometimes feel lost going from one era to another?
I get stuck in them. Sometimes I don't know what century I'm in. But it's a great skill to have as an actor, to have sets and costumes already there. It does a lot for you to be able to throw yourself into a new story and immediately get a sense of the world you're in when you get there.

The Danish Girl does bring you back to portraying Scandinavian culture.
It's part of my history and my life growing up. Back during A Royal Affair, I loved being back in the 18th century. I was able to find personal connections to Caroline Mathilde (her character), and it gave me a lot to being someone's voice from such a long time ago.... With The Danish Girl we tried to find historical inspirations, but it was also about meeting people, who had such generosity, in the transgender community, especially people like my character who had been friends or loved ones of people transitioning.

What kinds of things did you learn from people who had been close to people transitioning?
Every single story ends up being extremely different. Sometimes they said it was tough to give them that time. They said they were also transitioning. Like any couple going through a huge change, they both needed to find their feet on the ground in a new location. That's something I could relate to with whatever you're going through as everything's changing around.

I'd argue this is also a great break-up film, and one that isn't about a couple who split bitterly. It's about their struggles to maintain a connection despite parting ways.
Love includes being able to let that person go, the person you love the most. You still have affection for someone, even when things get bad. It was a unique story, but I was amazed by the romantic aspect, and the love between them. Of course they go off on different roads, but they go on the same journey.... They know that and they're still able to reach out and tell the other person they're connected somehow. That's something I felt from page one to the end.

page one

INTERVIEW

Actor gained insight from transgender community

Matt Prigge
Metro | New York

Eddie Redmayne is up for a Golden Globe for best actor in a drama for his role in The Danish Girl. FOCUS FEATURES VIA AP

Redmayne's re-education

Eddie Redmayne is very aware of how much has changed in the last couple years. Mainstream acceptance of the trans community has been on the rise, and there is now greater demand for trans roles to be played by trans actors, as with Laverne Cox on Orange is the New Black and the cast of Tangerine.

Redmayne, to his credit, took the subject very seriously as soon as he was involved with The Danish Girl, about Lili Elbe, one of the first people to transition from male to female, a number of years ago.

The Oscar-winner talks about how his education meant more to him than just doing a film.

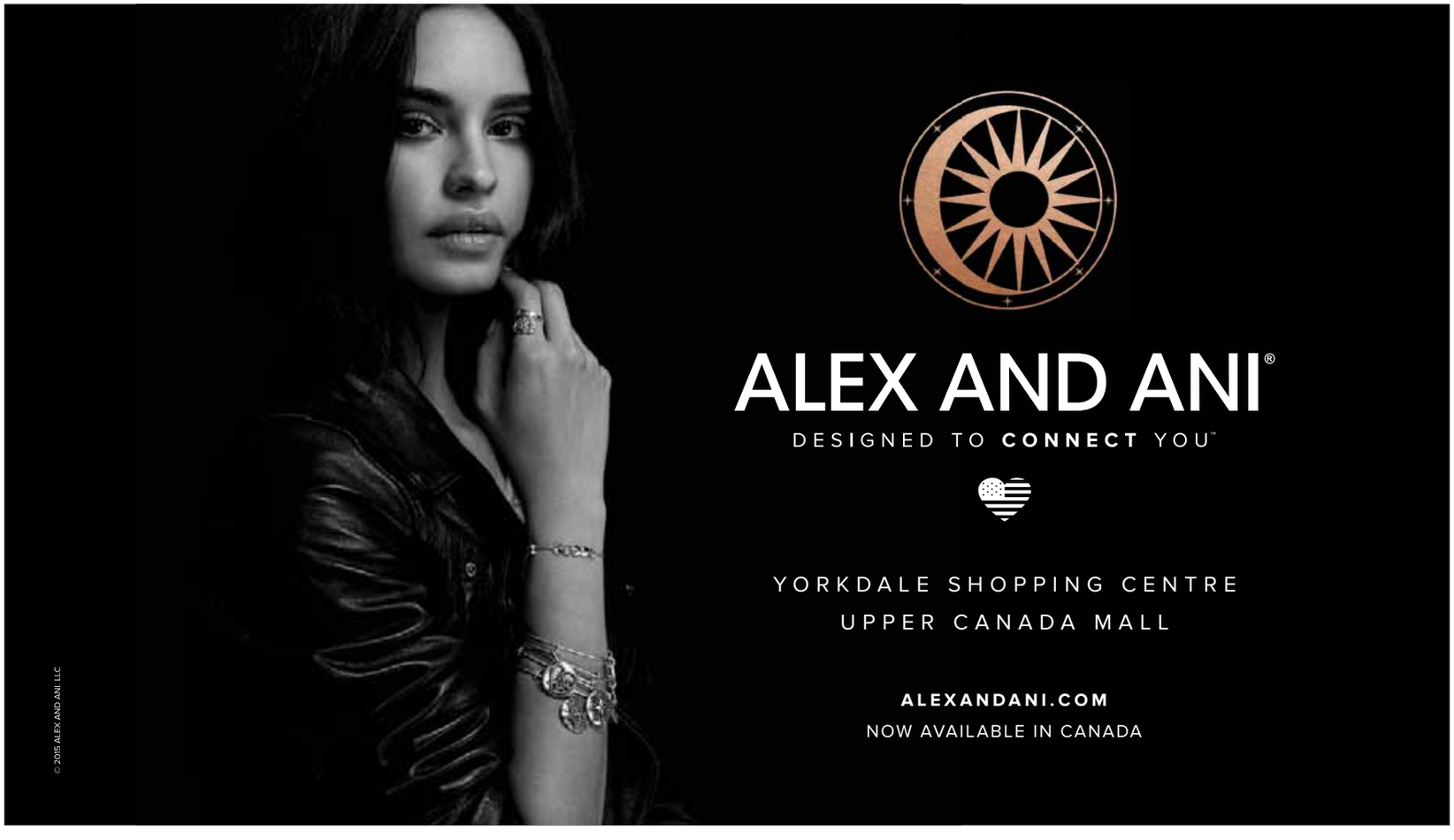
You actually won your Oscar for The Theory of Everything while you were shooting The Danish Girl. That must have been a gear-shift.
We were quite in the thick of shooting. I flew out to Los Angeles with my wife, and it was the most frenzied, adrenaline-fuelled two days of euphoria and excitement. There was so much adrenaline pumping into my body I can barely remember any of it.

The next thing I knew we were back on set, doing a scene where Lily was undergoing surgery. I was lying there on this bed and the whole thing felt like this weird dream. Very odd.

You were involved with this for a few years before it was finally green-lit. It seems like that gave you time to research and get it right.
Until it was green-lit, it was more about learning for my own sake. I'd been attached to it, then it didn't look like it was happening. Then when I was working with Lana Wachowski (on Jupiter Ascending), I mentioned Lili and Gerda (her former wife, played by Alicia Vikander) to her, and she was incredibly passionate about her story and spoke so eloquently about Gerda's paintings of Lili. She pointed me to where I should start educating myself. Then once it got green-lit, I started meeting members of the trans community from different generations. Everyone was so stunningly generous in sharing their experiences in order to educate me. Above and beyond the film, life-wise it was an amazing thing.

What kinds of things in particular did you learn?
I'd always summed that being transgender involved some form of physical transformation, and I realized that's absolutely not the case. It's entirely to do with what's in one's mind. Whether one has undergone any physical changes is neither here nor there. All the women I talked to described how they had known from a very early age that they were a different gender than that which they'd been assigned at birth. What was important for me was that when Lili was living as Einar, she was uncomfortable in this guise.

The Lili of later in the film is very different from when she was first transitioning.
I spoke to one trans woman in Los Angeles who described early in her transition, there was an experimentation of trying makeup. Perhaps she would put too much makeup on or wear clothes that were overly feminine. She made mistakes, almost. She called it "hyper-feminization." She related it to a young girl's puberty or adolescence — of trying things. Looking at Gerda's paintings of Lili, the poses are quite feminine and almost heightened. That was an insight. As she's unpeeling and finding herself, she's almost copying.



Daisy Ridley plays Rey in The Force Awakens. HANDOUT

Daisy Ridley is not giving away anything

INTERVIEW

Actress talks Star Wars, keeps movie's secrets

Daisy Ridley may not be as brave as her character in Star Wars: The Force Awakens, but she's close.

In her first-ever film role, the 23-year-old British-born actress plays Rey, a pilot and scavenger at the centre of the action in the hugely anticipated Episode VII.

The hardest thing about the job, Ridley said, was overcoming her own fears.

"It's one thing for other people to see potential in you and it's quite another for you to understand that and see it in yourself," she said.

"So of course everyone else being wonderful helps, but there's a certain level of growth... you have to do as a person... It's just like life times a million."

Right now, that life is a sniffley one that includes lots of airplanes and interviews.

The film's nonstop promotional schedule has left Ridley with a cold that has her wrapped in a winter coat on a recent warm Southern California day.

But even illness doesn't weaken her resolve when it comes to keeping the film's hotly guarded secrets.

Though co-star Harrison Ford has said Rey wields a lightsaber in the film, Ridley deflected the question when asked directly.

"Finn and Kylo have a fight with a lightsaber," is all she would say, referring to co-stars John Boyega and Adam Driver, whose tussle has already been shown in the film's trailers.

The actress did undergo months of physical training to prepare for her role, a regimen that included weightlifting, climbing and "staff training" — footage shows Rey running and fighting with a staff.

How much different could a lightsaber be?

"I had to look like I could look after myself in the desert and drag and scavenging things across sand," she said.

The youngest of five, Ridley appeared in small roles in medical and crime television dramas in the U.K. before capturing director J.J. Abrams' attention in her audition for The Force Awakens.

The film's set transported Ridley to the Star Wars world, where Abrams and the cast helped allay an initial feeling she describes as "terror."

"Luckily, to have J.J. there, who is so kind and considerate and encouraging, and to have a crew of people who made me feel safe and not rushed and not pressured, that is precisely what took the pressure off."

So did bonding with Boyega. The two would sing songs from The Lion King before shooting their scenes and explored the markets of Abu-Dhabi on their one shared day off.

"We got on so well," Ridley said.

"It was so much fun all the time, and to have him with me through this whole thing, both in filming and afterward, has been incredible."

One thing the actress isn't prepared for is the level of fame she's likely to experience. She tries not to think about it.

"The fame side of things is a weird twist that I'm not kind of interested in," she said.

"If I was going to be recognized for anything, Star Wars is all right." THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

> **It's one thing for other people to see potential in you and it's quite another for you to understand that and see it in yourself.**
> Daisy Ridley

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PEOPLE PLACES THINGS

Kiwi actor departs from his usual roles in new film

Steve Gow
For Metro Canada

Jemaine Clement is perhaps Hollywood's least likely leading man — if only because he doesn't really want to be one.

"I've had a couple of things that were more dramatic or more a leading role (but) I wasn't interested in doing a leading role," explained the Kiwi comic-actor over the line from New Zealand.

"I think I just wanted to do other kinds of things like writing and doing music."

One half of the popular Flight of the Conchords, Clement has been active since the comedy duo's HBO series final episode aired in 2009 but mostly working in the shadows as a supporting player in movies like Dinner With Schmucks or Muppets Most Wanted.

With this Friday's VOD release of the dramedy People Places Things however, Clement took on the rare role as leading man because "this time the idea didn't bother me; it didn't intimidate me like it once did."

In the film, Clement plays a graphic novelist flailing emotionally after he catches the mother of his twin girls having an affair with a mutual pal.

Forced into single fatherhood, he must juggle the minefield of being a dad and dating in Manhattan.

"Usually if someone is failing as a father, they're (less) in the story and you may not see that they have good intentions — you may not see that they're trying," said Clement, of his pull to the part that's drawn praise for its delicate balance of humour and hardship.

"Like real life, it's not all jokes and it's not all sad — it's somewhere in between."

Although Clement has been lauded for this compassionate leading man, he insists his aspirations lie in remaining a supporting actor.

Jemaine Clement, with Aundrea Gadsby and Gia Gadsby, in People Places Things. HANDOUT

In fact, he has even begun talking with his former partner Bret McKenzie about reuniting Flight of the Conchords — although a return to television is rather unlikely.

"It was like making a sitcom and recording an album in the time that you'd usually do one of those things. Either one of those things is hard enough," reminisced Clement.

"I enjoyed that (but) it's just that in the whole TV series, it was a lot to do."

FAVOURITES

Jemaine Clement's favourite person, place and thing:

Favourite person
"Probably my son," admitted the comedian. "Usually I would answer my mum so it's between them — they have to fight it out."

Favourite place
"The Coromandel in New Zealand is really beautiful," said Clement of the country's popular holiday destination. "But New York is my favourite city so that will just have a battle too."

Favourite thing
"That's easy, my guitar," laughed Clement, who is planning on reuniting with his musical partner for Flight of the Conchords. "We have been hanging out and doing a little writing. It's not intensive yet (but) in a few months we'll be back into it."

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5 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE GOLDEN GLOBES

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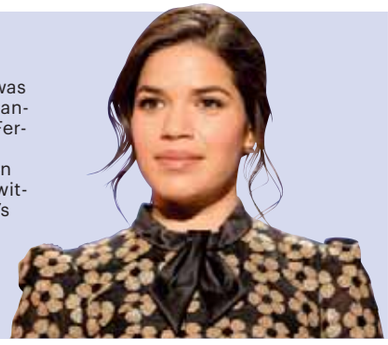

The Golden Globes' official Twitter account was drawing flak even before the nominees were announced after mistaking presenter America Ferrera for Gina Rodriguez.

In a series of tweets, which have since been amended, the Globes linked to Rodriguez's twitter account (@HereIsGina) instead of Ferrera's (@AmericaFerrera).

Luckily, attentive social media users did what they do best and captured the offending tweets — while throwing in some snarky responses for good measure.

2 Canada's sole nominee

Irish-Canadian author Emma Donoghue was the only Canuck to pick up a nomination this year. Donoghue, who is based in London, Ont., got the nod for the adaptation of her novel, Room. The book tells the story of a young boy and his mother who are held captive in a shed. The film won the People's Choice Award at the Toronto International Film Festival earlier this year and has been generating major Oscar buzz. Directed by Lenny Abrahamson, the movie also picked up Golden Globe nominations for best film drama and best film actress in a drama for Bree Larson, who plays the child's mother.

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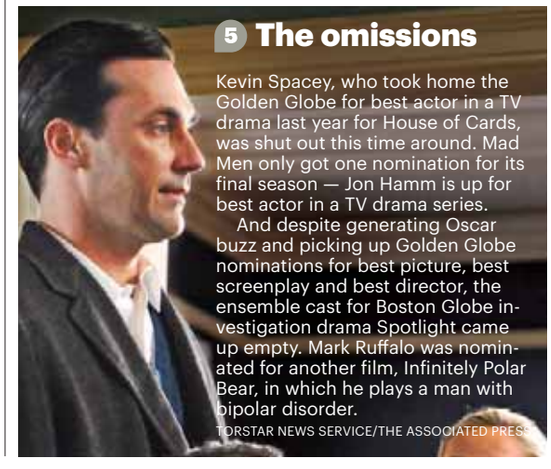
3 Must-sees before 2015 ends

Several big-screen nominees are not even being released until Christmas. Leonardo DiCaprio is nominated for The Revenant, a film about a 19th century frontiersman that is also in the running for best motion picture - drama, best director and best original score. Will Smith is nominated for Concussion, which tells the story of the doctor who discovers the prevalence of brain damage in professional football players.

4 No surprises here

It's no surprise that Julia Louis-Dreyfus picked up another nomination for her starring role in HBO series, Veep. It's Louis-Dreyfus's fourth nomination for the comedy, and the seventh in her career. Box office hit The Martian received three nominations: best picture comedy, best director (Ridley Scott) and best actor (Matt Damon). Released in October, the two-hour-plus sci-fi comedy has already grossed more than $221 million in the U.S.

5 The omissions



Kevin Spacey, who took home the Golden Globe for best actor in a TV drama last year for House of Cards, was shut out this time around. Mad Men only got one nomination for its final season — Jon Hamm is up for best actor in a TV drama series.

And despite generating Oscar buzz and picking up Golden Globe nominations for best picture, best screenplay and best director, the ensemble cast for Boston Globe investigation drama Spotlight came up empty. Mark Ruffalo was nominated for another film, Infinitely Polar Bear, in which he plays a man with bipolar disorder.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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STEP INTO ANOTHER WORLD

Serial season two is here

PODCASTS

Taliban prisoner's story to be a TV show

The widely popular podcast Serial has arrived.

In the highly-anticipated second season, NPR producer Sarah Koenig tells the story of Bowe Bergdahl, a U.S. soldier who was taken prisoner by the Taliban after disappearing from a base in Afghanistan in 2009.

After five years in captivity, Bergdahl was released in a prisoner exchange and U.S. President Barack Obama announced that he was on his way home.

But, as Koenig explains, while Bergdahl's release was initially celebrated, "public reaction to his return flipped."

Soldiers from his unit called him a deserter and the U.S. army launched an investigation into how he was taken prisoner.

"Through all of this, Bergdahl has been quiet. He hasn't spoken to the press or done any interviews on TV. He's been like a ghost at the centre of a raucous

Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl, the focus of Serial's second season, was held prisoner for years by the Taliban. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

fight," Serial explains.

In the first episode — called "DUSTWUN," the military acronym for "duty status — whereabouts unknown," which is available online — listeners hear Bergdahl's voice, from about 25 hours of taped phone conversations with filmmaker Mark Boal.

"There I was in the open desert and I'm not about to outrun a bunch of motorcycles," Bergdahl tells Boal near the end of the episode about how he was taken. "I couldn't do anything against six or seven guys with AK47s. They pulled up, and that was it."

Boal, who wrote and produced Zero Dark Thirty and The Hurt Locker, is Koenig's production partner for season two.

"This one idiosyncratic guy makes a radical decision at the age of 23, to walk away into Afghanistan, and the consequences of that decision, they spin out, wider and wider. And at every turn you're surprised, the picture changes," Koenig says in the first episode about Bergdahl's story.

"To get the full picture, you need to go very, very small, into one person's life — and also very, very big, into the war in Afghanistan."

People quickly took to social media to celebrate the podcast's return.

"More intriguing than I expected w. bergdahl's story," wrote Twitter user Lauren Woods, "guessing it will get even better."

"Raise your hand if all you really care about is listening to the first episode of season 2 of @serial," added Claire Cole.

And some were already hooked. "Just listened to Serial season 2. Pretty much got me engrossed. I'm into this story," wrote Amy Hoag.

Season two — which will be told over eight to 10 episodes, Koenig told the New York Times — is being developed into a TV show. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

TV PERSONALITIES

Nardwuar recovers in hospital from stroke

Offbeat celebrity interviewer Nardwuar the Human Serviette is recovering from a stroke in Vancouver.

The humorous TV personality and musician, whose real name is John Ruskin, has the news posted on his Twitter account.

The posting issued Wednesday night says the 47-year-old YouTube star suffered the stroke at a party in Vancouver.

It also says he's recovering at Vancouver General Hospital.

The nasally voiced Vancouver native is known for his eccentric approach to interviews, which he conducts in a tartan tam cap.

His interview subjects have ranged from Snoop Dogg, Chuck D, Iggy Pop and Katy Perry to Rush's Geddy Lee and former U.S. president Gerald Ford. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Chuck D and Nardwuar in Austin, Texas. THE CANADIAN PRESS/HANDOUT

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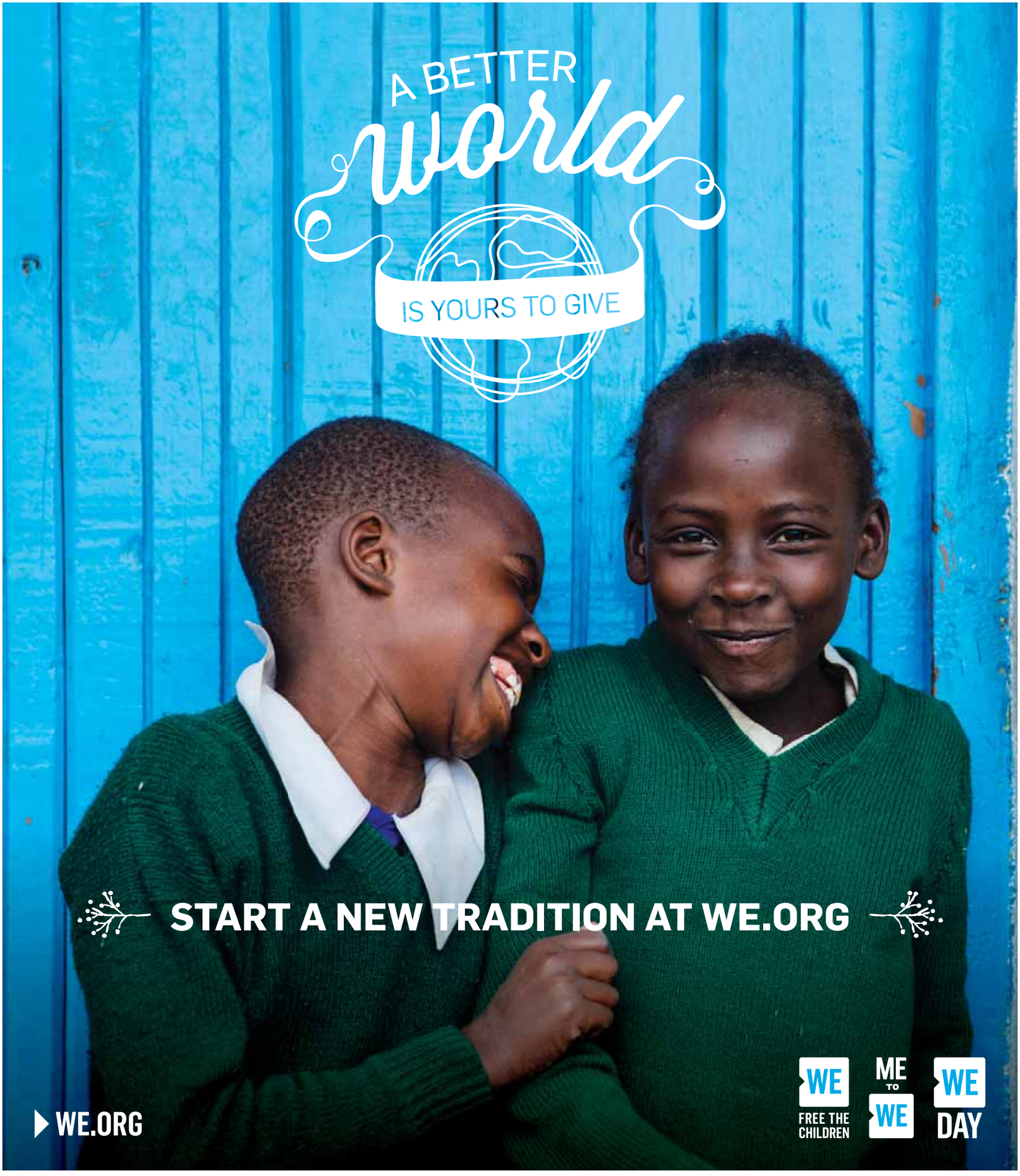
Toys must be new, unwrapped, and in original packaging. This offer is only redeemable onsite at Guest Services. One discount per guest. Toys will be collected at the time of purchase. Promotion only valid during regular operating hours and cannot be combined with any other discount or promotion. This offer is subject to availability and may change or end at any time.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FREE THE CHILDREN
ME TO WE
WE DAY

Spirit of the West's time for a rest

HOME FOR A REST

Last call for band behind classic pub-crawl song

Alan Cross
For Metro Canada

You'll have to excuse me, I'm not at my best/ I've been gone for a week, I've been drunk since I left

If someone has written a better drinking song than Spirit of the West's Home for a Rest, I haven't heard it. While in the U.K., frontman John Mann and guitarist Geoffrey Kelly documented a rather intense crawl of pubs and other establishments over the course of a week.

You'll have to excuse me, I'm not at my best
I've been gone for a week, I've been drunk since I left
These so-called vacations will soon be my death
I'm so sick from the drink, I need home for a rest.

The song originally appeared on Spirit of the West's 1990 album, Save This House, and has since become the classic Canadian drinking song. Most musicians only dream of writing a song that spans generations. I'm pretty sire an ability to recite the lyrics is part of the citizenship test.

Things have not been going well for John over the last decade. In 2009, he was diagnosed with colorectal cancer but was able to overcome it. By 2011, he was cancer-free.

But then he noticed that he was having more trouble remembering things. He'd been experiencing minor lapses as far back as 2001 but they seemed to be getting worse. Song lyrics were forgotten. Familiar guitar chord changes were lost. The memory issues got worse during his cancer treatments but his doctors thought they'd go away once the cancer was eradicated.

They didn't. In fact, they got worse.

In September 2014, John and his wife, playwright Jill Daum, decided to go public with John's condition. Barely into his 50s, he was diagnosed with early-onset Alzheimer's, an incurable degeneration of cognitive functions. With the time John has left, he and Jill want to do what they can about raising awareness of a disease that's going to become more prevalent as the population ages.

John can still perform, but he needs help. Lyrics are on an iPad. He has someone with him to guide him through the performance. But Spirit of the West recognizes that the time has come to bring the band's career to a gracious close. A couple of farewell shows have been set for the Commodore Ballroom in Vancouver on April 15 and 16.

THERAPY

How you can help

Meanwhile, John and Jill are not giving up. Having exhausted every possible treatment, they are now turning to experimental and very expensive stem cell therapy. One course of treatment can cost up to $50,000. If you're interested in helping out, you can donate at Generosity.com.

For more, go to AJournalofMusicalThings.com or follow me on twitter at @alancross.

BOOK BRIEF

Big shake of a lamb's tale

This is the story of how an injured lamb named Sweet Pea started a war. Well, a bidding war. John and Jennifer Churchman's lamb hurt a leg on the Vermont farm where they keep sheep, ducks and geese.

To celebrate Sweet Pea's recovery, the couple dressed up their animals, fed them delicacies like pumpkin slices and shared photos online. The images formed the illustrations for Sweet Pea & Friends: The SheepOver, a children's book they initially self-published.

Within days of a blog post about Sweet Pea by a local bookstore owner, the Churchmans had a literary agent. A bidding war for the story among five major publishing houses followed.

The story of Sweet Pea, published by Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, is in stores in time for Christmas. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Sweet Pea book in a store. AP

SPONSORED CONTENT

RESTORING SIGHT & HOPE

Anita, a young Nepalese mother, can tell you how devastating it is to watch your three-year-old son's face fade away. She can tell you how hard it is to miss the special moments in your child's life as you slowly lose your sight.

This holiday season consider what it might be like to lose your sight, to miss watching the children in your life light up from joy.

For women and girls like Anita living in developing countries, losing sight means losing everything.

Two out of three of the world's blind are women. Ninety per cent live in the developing world. Beyond a lack of access to care and financial resources, women's needs are often not prioritized by male-headed households. Yet without vision, they cannot work or live independently and become more vulnerable to poverty, ill-treatment and abuse.

Anita knows this all too well. As her vision worsened, her husband started treating her poorly and she was forced to live with relatives; she could no longer care for herself or her son. The greatest tragedy of Anita's story is that her vision loss was simply due to cataracts — an easily solvable problem that costs only $50 to fix.

Anita visited a hospital but couldn't afford the surgery. Thankfully, because of Seva Canada donors, Anita's costs were covered. With her vision restored, Anita plans to become a tailor, open her own business, and take care of her son. Anita's life has changed profoundly.

CONTRIBUTED

Restoring sight has a huge impact. It fights poverty by empowering women and girls to return to school, work and a life of independence.

This holiday season a generous donor is matching all gifts for women and girls*, so you can double your impact. A $50 donation becomes $100 and provides sight-restoring cataract surgery for two women. Donate at seva.ca

**A Seva donor has offered to match any donation you make from now until Dec. 31, up to $1,000.*

Content Solutions

A $50 DONATION IS GOOD FOR TWO CATARACT SURGERIES.

This holiday season, support eye care for women and girls and your donation will be matched. $50 becomes $100 and provides life-changing cataract surgery for 2 women in the developing world.

Donate at seva.ca or call 1-877-460-6622.

Seva CANADA

Seal those gifts with the best deal

SHOPPING TIPS

Sites like GiftFind helps shoppers find name-brand products

Camilla Cornell

As you rush to get that holiday shopping done, there are tools out there to help you find the best price online. ISTOCK

Jason Brown has been building websites for businesses since he was 16 years old. But October of this year marked his most ambitious project. As founder and CEO of GiftFind.ca, the 26-year-old unleashed his comprehensive price comparison site just in time for the busy holiday shopping season.

"I shop online a lot," says Brown. "But it can be a big headache. Many retailers sell the same products and it can take you hours and hours to find what you're looking for at the cheapest price."

Brown launched GiftFind.ca to fill a perceived hole in the Canadian market by helping consumers locate name-brand products at the lowest possible cost. "I felt there wasn't anyone in the marketplace doing a good job at aggregating all the really good e-commerce sites and making the experience easy for Canadians," he says.

His website features more than 300 million products from 500-plus retailers such as Amazon, Best Buy, Home Depot and Walmart. "Every big name in shopping is represented," says Brown. GiftFind.ca doesn't sell any products, but rather directs users to the stores with the lowest prices selling the items they're seeking.

Shoppers can check out the site's product and video reviews to narrow down shopping choices. And if you're stuck on what to get a niece or nephew for a milestone birthday, you can type '21st birthday gifts' into the tool bar to get ideas. (Potential GiftFind options included a T-shirt emblazoned 'Made in 1994' and the Big Bad Ass Book of Shots.) "We have colour and price filters as well, so you can customize your search," says Brown.

Brown expects a GiftFind mobile app to be released soon as well, but in the interim, he says, you can access the website on your smartphone if you want to make sure the deal you've found in a bricks-and-mortar store stacks up with the lowest prices online.

GiftFind is the newest shopping comparison site, but it certainly isn't the only one available in Canada. ShopBot.ca has been a player in the market since 2004 and offers a full range of shopping categories from computers to wine and gifts, as well as a collection of products and stores you may not find on other price comparison sites. It too directs you to the retailer with the lowest price. And fully two-thirds of its retailers are Canadian.

In addition, Shoptoit.ca, launched in 2005, boasts a comprehensive selection of stores and products and Pricegrabber.ca and PriceFinder.ca both offer a product selection more heavily weighted on the side of electronics.

For shoppers, the range of price comparison websites offers an opportunity to let your fingers do the walking, sussing out the best deal on just about anything.

ORGANIZE

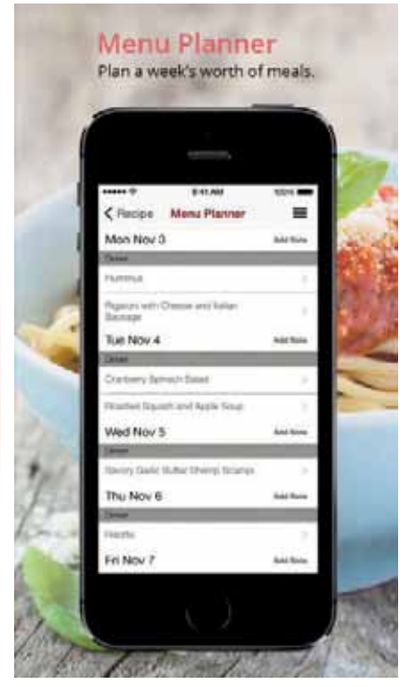
Wunderlist - free for iOS or Android
Your to-do lists and notes are shareable with other users, which is also great for delegating holiday tasks.

24me - free for iOS or Android
This virtual personal assistant won't let you forget anything. It will automatically send you event reminders, and syncs with social media apps so you can stay in touch with friends while you're on the go.

Yorkdale app for iPhone, Android, BlackBerry and Windows
The app for one of the city's busiest malls makes parking a cinch. Check the app for available spots at each of the mall's lots so you'll know where to head before you even get there.

Use this year's holiday helpers

Mike Yawney



Getting ready for the holidays can be stressful! Keeping track of gifts, planning get togethers, while staying on budget, is challenging.

Here are a few apps to make the holidays go a little smoother!

Flipp - Free
iOS, Android
This app brings all your local flyers to your smartphone or tablet. Find deals food ad gifts, bookmark them, then bring your smartphone to the store for reference. This app is also a great way to see if the gifts you buy go on sale after you've bought them.

Ink Cards - Free
iOS, Android
Turn smartphone photos into colourful greeting cards. Choose a theme, add a photo then email your holiday card to family and friends. You can also get Ink Cards to professionally print and mail your card for you.

The Christmas List - $1.99
iOS
Create a gift budget for multiple people then stick to it with this handy app. You can arrange your shopping list by stores or send your list to others if you're sharing gift-giving duties.

Big Oven - Free
iOS, Android, Windows Phone
With more than 250 thousand recipes, you'll never run out of ideas for the holidays. This app also helps you prepare grocery lists, schedule your meals and comes up with ideas on what to do with the leftovers.

Sing Along Christmas Carols - Free
iOS
Learn the words to all your favourite holiday songs. This Karaoke-style app is perfect for Christmas carolling or teaching your kids new holiday songs

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1 Poo-Pourri Before-You-Go Toilet Spray ($12.25 - $18.50)
2 Cotton Mesh Produce Bag ($15.50)
3 Anointment Natural Skin Care Wet Shave Kit ($60)
4 Bamboo Towel Set ($45)
5 Magnifeco by Kate Black ($19.95)

Have a green Christmas

ECO-FRIENDLY

Think about the environment and others

Todd Lewys

With the green movement gaining momentum, we thought we'd include a cross-section of novel eco-friendly gift choices for your consideration.

Anointment Natural Skin Care Wet Shave Kit: This gift set includes a handcrafted pottery shaving scuttle, shave brush and old-fashioned, unscented shaving soap. The soap contains moisturizing French green clay, skin-soothing ground sandalwood and flaxseed — plus castor oil for impressively dense foam. $60 at Grassroots Environmental Products at grassrootsstore.com.

Magnifeco: Your Head-To-Toe Guide to Ethical Fashion and Non-Toxic Beauty, by Kate Black: This book by Kate Black is, in just a few words, a head-to-toe guide to ethical fashion and non-toxic beauty. Black examines these subjects, recommends a number of ways for consumers to make better decisions and introduces the brands and designers leading the way along this socially responsible path. $19.95 at Amazon.ca.

Bamboo Sheet Set: Sold by British Columbia eco-retailer All Things Being Eco, these bamboo sheets — available in queen and king size sets — offer a rich lustre, soft feel and, due to their bamboo construction, are very durable. $165-$195 at allthingsbeingeco.ca.

Cotton Mesh Produce Bag: Made right here in Canada, this cotton mesh produce bag is an environmentally responsible — not to mention good looking — alternative to using plastic bags.

You can use it to take your fruits and veggies home from the market, and the breathable mesh allows for easy storage in the fridge. $15.50 at eco-handbags.ca.

Bamboo Towel Set: Softer and more absorbent than cotton, these towels are made of 100 per cent bamboo viscose yarn. Naturally hypo-allergenic, anti-microbial and more odour-resistant than cotton, the set comes with a bath towel, hand towel and face cloth. $45 at allthingsbeingeco.ca.

Bookhou for Mini Mioche Hoodie Tee: The Toronto-based company enlisted local designer Bookhou to design a winning hoodie-tee for children. The result is a 100 per cent organic cotton hoodie tee that comes in 10 sizes and three prints — olive triangle, black bure and eggplant floral. $33 at minimioche.com.

Chemex Coffee Maker: With four sizes to choose from — three, six, eight and 10 cups — this coffee maker is as green as you can find. Made of non-porous borosilicate glass, the carafe doesn't absorb odours or retain harmful chemical residues. It uses patented Chemex bonded filters (US$8.90). US$38.90-$47.50 at chemexcoffeemaker.com or Amazon.ca.

4

VerTerra Palm Leaf Dinnerware: Greenmunch — based in Sherwood Park, Alta. — offers VerTerra Palm Leaf Dinnerware plates made from fallen palm leaves and water. They are microwave safe up to two minutes on high, and are oven-safe at 350 degrees for up to 45 minutes. One hundred per cent compostable, they biodegrade in less than two months. $14-$27 at greenmunch.ca.

5

Weleda Calendula Baby Face Cream: Made with 96 per cent organic ingredients, this cream is free of synthetic fragrances, chemical preservatives and petroleum-derived ingredients. It moisturizes and softens baby's sensitive skin. $23 at minimioche.com, well.ca and other retailers.

Poo-Pourri Before-You-Go Toilet Spray: According to the good folks at All Things Being Eco, this makes a great stocking stuffer. Little wonder — an ounce of perfumed prevention can go a long way in the bathroom. $12.25-$18.50 at allthingsbeingeco.ca.

Send the gift of money worldwide.

This holiday, send money to family and friends worldwide from your Scotiabank account through a smartphone, online or by visiting a branch.

scotiabank.com/westernunion

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Pets set to get Xmas benefits

Ylva Van Buuren

'Twas the night before Christmas and all through the house, not a creature was stirring... except for the family pet who was sniffing around under the tree.

Wrap up one of these practical and fun gift ideas for the pets on your list.

1

PICTURE PERFECT: A make-your-own pet calendar is a wonderful and thoughtful gift for any animal lover. A3 or A4 Wall Calendars feature 13 photos each. $22 at Photobox.ca.

2

CHEW ON THIS: Plush dog chew toy, $5.99 at Winners, winners.ca.

RAIN DATE: Some dogs dislike the rain.... but the Pet Life Pour-Protection Umbrella will keep them dry. It has a reflective lining and leash holder. $34 at Amazon.ca.

ADD LIGHT YEARS: Active cats will love the Petsafe Bolt Interactive Laser Toy — and it gives owners quality time with their pet too. $21.99 at Amazon.ca

TO ALL A GOOD NIGHT: Invite your four-legged friend to curl up on this designer dog bed by Jo Alcorn. $99 at Shop.ca.

4

BARK BINGO: Wrap up a dog bingo game for the pet lover on your list. $39.95 at Crate and Barrel, crateandbarrel.ca.

PLAY BALL: Dogs can learn to retrieve with the Toys "R" Us Pets Fetch N' Treat Interactive Dog Toy — when the dog retrieves the ball and drops it in, the toy gives him a treat. $29.99 at PetSmart, petsmart.ca.

JINGLE BELL: Adjustable glow-in-the-dark collar is comfortable and lightweight, and a jingle bell makes it easy to find the cat. Martha Stewart Pets collar, $9.99 at PetSmart, petsmart.ca.

HOLIDAY HELP: Wrap up a CanadaHelps Charity Gift Card — and invite the recipient to choose the charity from hundreds dedicated to the welfare of animals. Available in any denomination starting at $5 at CanadaHelps.org.

3

STINKY POOCH? The Rainburst Simple Shower uses a hydration reservoir or a 2L bottle of water to hose down your pet, and that will be a welcome gift for anyone who hikes or camps with their foraging four-legged friend (you never know what they're going to discover in the bushes!) $10.75 at Mountain Equipment Co-op, mec.ca.

6

FEATHERED FRIENDS: Perky Pet Mason Jar Wild Bird Seed Feeder looks like a vintage blue glass canning jar used in the 1800s, and will add a rustic appeal to any yard or balcony. The feeder has eight feeding ports and holds about one pound of seeds. $26.99 at Canvasback Pet Supplies, canvasbackpets.com.

HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS: Cats travel in comfort and style in a Sherpa Original Deluxe Carrier. Available in small, medium and large sizes, it comes with a seat belt and luggage strap. $69.99-$79.99 at Canvasback Pet Supplies, canvasbackpets.com.

PAW PROTECTION: Wellies dog boots protect paws from snow, salt, rain and mud. Extra-wide opening and Velcro closure make them easy to put on and take off. In black or red, durable yet soft silicone rubber. Different sizes start at $20.99. Canada Pooch Stores, canadapooch.com.

FOR BIRD BRAINS: Spirale cotton rope bird toy by Zoo-Max has pony beads and a small bell for fun play. Non-toxic. Assembles with a small wire. $10.99 at Pet Valu, petvalu.com.

5

SPECIAL OCCASION: You can dress them up and pretty well take them anywhere in a Pet Rainbow Tutu. Small, medium and large sizes, $7.99 at Pet Valu, petvalu.com.

SOLE SAVING: For dogs that have trouble walking on hardwood, Muttsoks paw protection socks have non-skid soles for indoor traction. Six sizes, $11 (set of 4) at muttluks.com.

7

1 Pet Rainbow Tutu, $7.99 at Pet Valu, petvalu.com.
2 Petsafe Bolt Interactive Laser Toy, $21.99 at Amazon.ca.
3 Perky Pet Mason Jar Wild Bird Seed Feeder, $26.99 at Canvasback Pet Supplies, canvasbackpets.com.
4 Designer dog bed by Jo Alcorn, $99 at Shop.ca.
5 Sherpa Original Deluxe Carrier, $69.99-$79.99 at Canvasback Pet Supplies, canvasbackpets.com.
6 Rainburst Simple Shower, $10.75 at Mountain Equipment Co-op, mec.ca.
7 Pet Life Pour-Protection Umbrella, $34 at Amazon.ca.

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HOLIDAY SALES EVENT
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Ultimate gifts for foodies

GIFT IDEAS

Some holiday favourites for those who love the kitchen

Tina Anson Mine

Whether you're looking for the tried-and-true or something a little different, these gifts are sure to delight the food lovers and aspiring chefs in your life.

For the retro enthusiast
Streamline Kitchen Timer. It's the details that make the look. This classic old-school kitchen timer watches the time (up to 55 minutes) and looks stylish doing it. It has an easy-to-set retro dial accented in bold black and red, and the case comes in an assortment of throwback colours, including mint green, burnt orange and fire-engine red. It's a cute gift that won't break your budget — you might even want to give your favourite cook two. $17.99, Home Outfitters, homeoutfitters.com.

For the seafood lover
Outset Oyster Grill Pan. The holidays fall smack in the middle of oyster season, and Canadians are no strangers to grilling in their parkas. So why not indulge the oyster lover on your list with this funky pan? Made of sturdy cast iron, it has perfectly shaped holes to hold a dozen oysters on the grill without spilling any of their tasty juices. You can also use it to serve oysters cold on the half-shell if you're not that into winter grilling. $47.99, Home Outfitters, homeoutfitters.com.

For the baker
Cambria Cake Stand. If you're going to go to all the trouble — and joy! — of baking a beautiful cake, you need something equally pretty to put it on. With clean lines and a modern but slightly rustic look, these laid-back cake stands come in a bunch of juicy hues. They're perfect for entertaining a holiday crowd at home. $73, Pottery Barn, potterybarn.com.

For the wine lover
Copper Wine Bottle Cooler. This stylish copper-toned chiller has the panache of a real copper bucket without the insane price tag. Sturdy iron handles give it a masculine edge and make it easy to tote from kitchen to table. Hint: To quick-chill your wine, add ice, fill the bucket about halfway with cold water and add a handful of salt before adding the bottle. $65, Pottery Barn, potterybarn.ca.

For the coffee addict
Le Creuset Café Stoneware French Press. This 27-ounce pot holds about three generous cups of coffee — just right for sharing a morning pick-me-up with a friend. Made of sturdy ceramic, it keeps coffee hot much longer than typical glass or metal French presses. The beautifully enameled stoneware is durable and looks great on the counter. $80, Williams-Sonoma, williams-sonoma.ca.

For the techno-cook
Sony Xperia Z3 tablet. This tablet is waterproof. Yes, you heard that right. While you can't dunk it all the way underwater (there are limits), this slim, compact Android-platform device tolerates splatters and can even take a quick rinse under the tap. It makes cooking your favourite online recipes a tidier experience. $699.99 with no plan or $49.99 with select two-year plans, bell.ca or rogers.ca.

For the gadget lover
Vegetable Spiralizer. Remember how much you loved that Tornado Potato at The Ex? Get ready to make it at home. This clever machine turns vegetables into four different-size spirals, from tiny angel hair (great for raw veggie "noodles") to wide, flat spirals (for those deep-fried potato curlicues you're now craving). Made of sturdy plastic and super-fast to use, it's a fun kitchen toy. $64.50, Lee Valley, leevalley.com.

For the hipster health nut
KoMo FlicFloc Manual Flaker. Why buy a sack of stale rolled oats at the grocery store when you can make them fresh at home? This old-fashioned hand mill turns raw oat groats into easy-to-use flakes that retain all the nutrients in the whole grain. Lovingly made of birch and steel, it's a keeper you can pass on to the next generation. $179, Grain Storm, grainstorm.com.

Tis the Season to be Thrilled!
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Raising a glass to fine wines

RECOMMENDATIONS

The good stuff can be found in almost every price range

Peter Rockwell

Are you haunted by the gifts of wine you gave from Christmases past? Here are a dozen bottles that are guaranteed to put a smile on the face of the wine lovers on your holiday shopping list.

FOR THE WINE NEWBIE

Not to say that anyone, no matter how wine engaged, wouldn't appreciate these wines, but they'll especially appeal to those just getting their palates wet.

KWV 2014 Contemporary Collection Chenin Blanc (South Africa, $9.45): A thirst-quenching dry white with plenty of light green fruit and balanced acidity.

Radio Boka 2013 Tempranillo (Spain, $10.95): Still undiscovered by many, the wines of Spain's Valencia region are real palate pleasers, with this well-priced Tempranillo a tasty mix of black cherry and subtle spice.

Fairview 2014 Goats do Roam Red (South Africa, $12.95): With a name poking fun at France's Côtes du Rhône region it's no wonder that this is a Shiraz-led blend of six different grapes. Light and juicy, its plummy fruit is drinkable right out of the bottle.

The Entertainer 2013 Red Blend (Australia, $15.95): Made by Wolf Blass in honour of its gregarious founder, this ripe, rounded red blend of Shiraz and Grenache has loads of berry fruit and a hint of residual sugar.

FOR THE ENTHUSIAST

If you're friends with an aficionado, one of these wines should turn their corkscrew (or twist off their cap).

Anselmi 2014 San Vincenzo IGT (Italy, $16.95): This inspired blend of Garganega, Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc is a muscular white with complex citrus and apricot. Aging in steel vats means there won't be any oak to distract you from the forward fruit.

O'Leary Unoaked Chardonnay VQA (Ontario, $13.95): One for the business-minded. Mr. Wonderful, Kevin O'Leary, joins the celebrity winemaking scene with this refreshing, citrus-meets-green apple Chardonnay perfect for seafood (even shark).

McManis Family Vineyards 2013 Cabernet Sauvignon (California, $19.95): A full-figured California Cabernet with thick, cassis-laden fruit and a touch of smoky wood thanks to six months of oak aging. Though big on ripe, jammy flavours, this is a surprisingly balanced red that drinks super smooth.

Jacob's Creek 2013 Double Barrel Shiraz (Australia, $19.95): Both wine and brown spirit fans will enjoy this uniquely aged Barossa Valley Shiraz that sees finishing time in used Scotch barrels. It all leads to a big-boned red with loads of chewy wood and dark chocolate.

Bonterra 2013 Chardonnay (California, $19.95): As the granddaddy of American organic wine producers, Bonterra's made a name for itself by making consistent, full-flavoured wines like this Chardonnay. Fresh, bright and oozing tropical pineapple, lime and lemon, it makes for a perfect partner with roast poultry.

IF MONEY IS NO OBJECT

The holidays are all about giving; just be around when they open one of these bottles.

Montresor 2013 Amarone della Valpolicella (Italy, $36.45): Though you can drink them with food, an Amarone is a slow sipper, best paired with good conversation. Made by pressing dried grapes, this is a robust core of plums, raisins and dark black fruit, which makes it a great dinner opener and closer.

Taylor Fladgate 20-Year-Old Tawny Port (Portugal, $68.95): No liquid goes better with a roaring fire and cheese (especially Stilton) than Port. Made from a blend of 20-year-old wines, this is a sublime mix of brown sugar, nuts and spices.

Moët & Chandon 2004 Dom Pérignon Champagne (France, $249.95): Named for a French Benedictine monk, Dom Pérignon is arguably the most recognizable name from Champagne. The 2003 balances sophisticated citrus fruit with enough depth to float a cruise ship, ready for any occasion.

1. KWV 2014 Contemporary Collection Chenin Blanc, $9.95
2. Fairview 2014 Goats do Roam Red, $12.95
3. Bonterra 2013 Chardonnay, $19.95
4. McManis Family Vineyards 2013 Cabernet Sauvignon, $19.95
5. Jacob's Creek 2013 Double Barrel Shiraz, $19.95
6. Moet & Chandon 2004 Dom Pérignon Champagne, $249.95
7. St-Germain Elderflower, $41.95
8. Forty Creek Distillery El Espolon Reposado Tequila, $44.75
9. New Holland Beer Barrel Bourbon, $73.05
10. Remy Martin Louis XIII Cognac, $3,100

Finding the right spirit of the season

Spirit lovers are a complicated bunch: Brand loyal to a fault, many are becoming more open-minded when it comes to putting something new into their mouths. That makes finding the perfect gift for the hard liquor fan on your holiday list a bit of a challenge. Well, not really, any one of these unique spirits of Christmas present will make the perfect present.

Belvedere 007 SPECTRE Limited Edition Vodka ($49.95-$49.98): Bond, James Bond is back and he's drinking cocktails again. Belvedere is an official sponsor of SPECTRE, 007's latest adventure, and you can shake, but not stir, your next martini with a shot of this limited edition version of their quintessential vodka.

St-Germain Elderflower Liqueur ($41.95-$49.95): Liqueurs are a strange beast. While the best sellers are coffee, cream or brandy-based, they have so much more to offer. St-Germain is all about the elderflower. Great chilled on its own, it's one of the best mixers with wine.

The Kraken Black Spiced Rum Ceramic Decanter ($41.95-$44.99): Rum's recent renaissance came with a spicy edge, and Kraken, with its black, savoury drinkability and cool packaging, is at the center of its celebrity. Taking its bottle to the next level, this limited edition is a must for any rum lover.

Domaine Pinnacle Chic Choc Spiced Rum ($33.75-$34.99): Made in Quebec, this rum is a blend of Nordic spices, including peppery green alder and whiterod berries, harvested from the province's Chic Choc Mountains. Nice and spicy, it's a great base for holiday cocktails.

Cîroc Grape Spirit ($49.98-$49.95): Being made with grapes means Cîroc is more eau-du-vie than vodka. Technicalities aside, this neutral spirit, whose brand ambassador just happens to be Sean 'Diddy' Combs, has a fruitier side that works wonders when blended with fruit juices.

Compass Box Great King Street Glasgow Blended Whisky ($57.45): Glaswegians like their whisky full-bodied and peaty and this modern take on Scotland's classic 19th century blends offers both in spades. Aging in used sherry barrels adds a backbone of dried fruit and wine to the mix.

Death's Door Gin ($37.95): Named for the passageway between Wisconsin's Washington Island and the Door County peninsula, Death's Door doesn't hit you over the head with its combination of botanicals. It doesn't need to, here mellow is more and its reserved flavour profile is pleasingly creamy and smooth.

Forty Creek Distillery El Espolón Reposado Tequila ($44.75): Wrapped in a cool Day of the Dead-themed label and made with 100 per cent Blue Agave, aged for six months in American oak barrels, this lightly wooded reposado drinks well above its price point.

Wiser's Hopped Whisky ($28.95): A brown spirit for the beer lover. Made with a blend of five- to nine-year-old Canadian whiskies, it sees a dry hopping toward the end of its aging process that plays up the aromatic appeal of the hops, while downplaying their bitterness.

New Holland Beer Barrel Bourbon ($73.05): Twice distilled and initially aged in American oak, this whisky then sees three months in used beer barrels, which adds biscuity notes and a relaxed malty character to its rich toffee and caramel flavour.

Highland Park Dark Origins Single Malt Whisky ($99.95): Inspired by the distillery's infamous founder Magnus Eunson, this scotch drinks as sexy as it looks. Layered with chocolate, citrus and sherry thanks to being aged in twice as many first fill sherry casks as the original Highland Park 12-year-old.

Remy Martin Louis XIII Cognac ($3,100): If Cognac is the king of spirits then Louis XIII is the king of kings. Made with a blend of brandy, some of which is over a century old, it comes housed in a decanter designed by Baccarat Crystal.

PETER ROCKWELL

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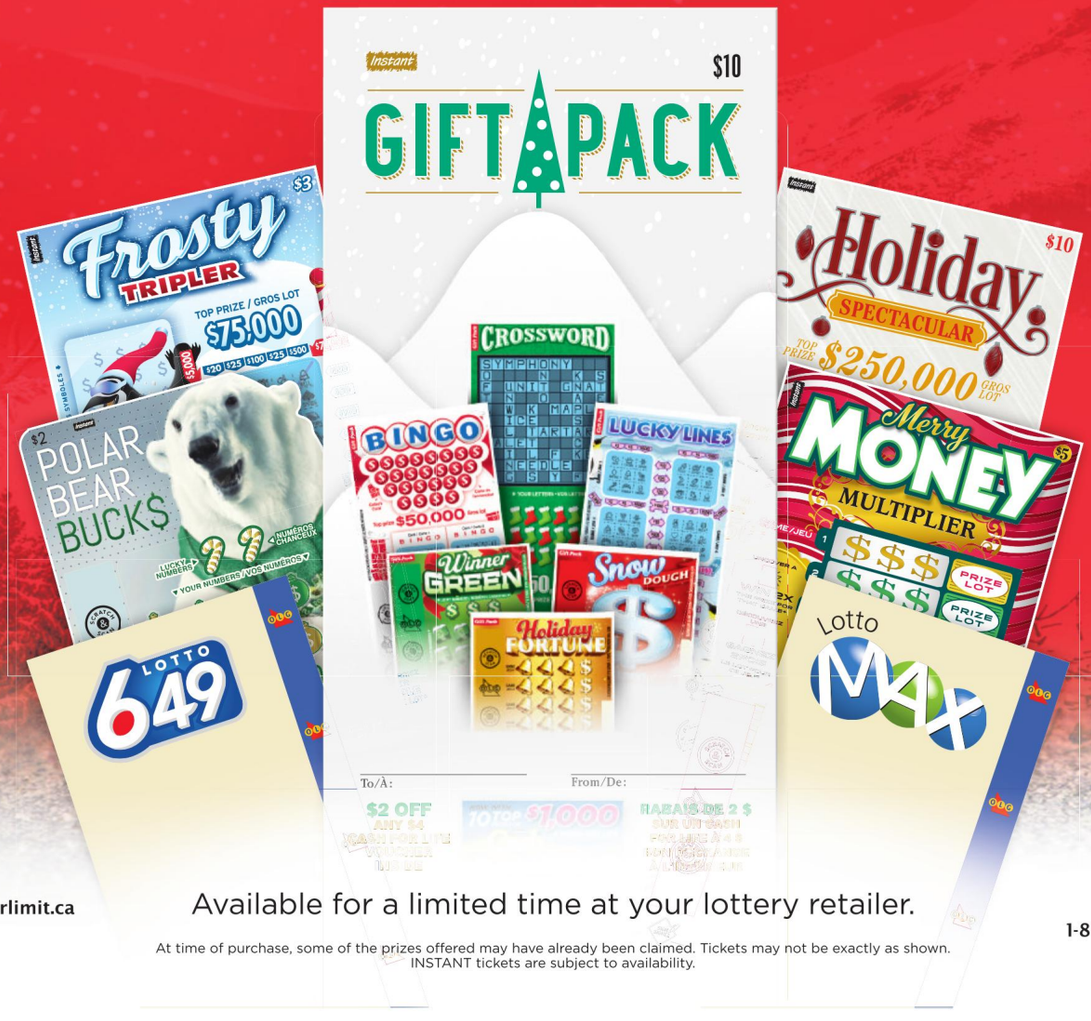

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TECH IT OUT: GIFTS FOR HER

Recommended buys for that special someone

Resist the predictable.

Instead of buying a spa certificate or mall gift card, why not wow your partner with a hot high-tech toy?

Granted, an activity tracker or touchscreen tablet might cost a little more, but there are some great deals to be had this season. And hey, isn't your significant other worth it?

Ranging in price from $34.99 to $599.99, the following are a few recommendations to suit varying tastes and budgets.

Stream dream

If you're not interested in buying a new TV — but want to turn your existing one into a smarter one — the Roku 3 ($109.99) offers more than 1,700 channels – including all the biggies like Netflix, YouTube, Cineplex Store, Google Play Movies & TV and NHL.

Wet 'n' wild

If you're shopping for a book lover, the Kobo Aura H20 ($179.99) is the world's first waterproof ebook reader. Slip into the tub — or bring this Kobo to the pool or beach while on vacation — and it can remain underwater as deep as three feet for up to 30 minutes. The anti-glare e-ink screen can be read clearly in bright sunlight as well, or take advantage of the integrated light to read while curled up in bed.

No sweat

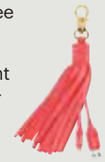
While Fitbit activity trackers start at just $69.99 for the Fitbit Zip, the Fitbit Charge HR ($149.99) helps you stay informed and motivated while being active. This wearable lets you set a daily goal — such as a certain number of steps taken, distance travelled or calories burned — and the lightweight and water-resistant wristband keeps track of your daily progress.

A touch of class

If budget permits, the Samsung Galaxy Tab S2 (from $449.99 for the 8-inch version) is a touchscreen tablet with a vibrant display — ideal for watching videos, playing games and viewing photos.

Cable girl

Who says charging and syncing your mobile phone or tablet has to be ugly? Belkin's fashion-forward charging cables decorate a purse, bag or keychain, but they're really USB cables to connect an iPhone, iPad or iPod touch to a computer for charging up and syncing to iTunes. Available for $24.99 apiece.



Have a seat

You enjoy taking a load off, so why shouldn't your smartphone? A quirky gift for a music lover is the aptly named Phoniture ($99), a colourful charging station and Bluetooth-speaker set designed to look like an armchair with matching ottoman. Drop your smartphone into the seat and plug your charging cable into the USB port on the back; the chair is then plugged into an AC outlet to juice up your phone.

MARC SALTZMAN

Gadgets for guys

Marc Saltzman

If it's true boys love their toys, then you'll find plenty of gadgety gift ideas to choose from this holiday season.

Whether you're shopping for a significant other, your dad, son or nephew, the latest in consumer electronics can go a long way.

Here's a look at a few suggestions.

Taking control

These amazing Harmony universal remotes from Logitech are super easy to program and use; simply plug the Harmony (from $49.99) into a computer's USB port and download codes from the Internet to the device, then press one of the activity-based commands on the remote, such as "Watch TV" or "Play a Blu-ray." The Harmony does the rest by turning on only the devices you need and switching to the right settings to begin watching. The flagship model, Harmony Elite ($389.99), replaces up to 15 remotes, houses a 2.4-inch touch screen (with support for an optional app), and through its hub (included) can also control other smart home devices.

Through the looking glass

If you're shopping for someone who likes skiing, mountain climbing or cycling, you might opt for one of those trendy POV ("point of view") cameras. The GoPro HERO4 Silver (from $529.99) captures all the action from a first-person perspective, and hands-free, too, when mounted to your helmet, chest or bike (or since it's waterproof, maybe your snowboard or water skis). This version can shoot up to 4K Ultra HD video quality (15 frames per second) along with 12-megapixel photos up to 30 frames per second, and also features built-in and fast Wi-Fi connectivity to wirelessly send the videos and photos to a computer or website. If budget permits, the GoPro HERO4 Black edition ($649.99) shoots 4K video at a smoother 30 frames per second.

Listen up

If you're buying for a music lover, the House of Marley Liberate XL Over-Ear Sound Isolating Bluetooth Headphones ($149.99) block out ambient noise without a cable getting in the way. Simply pair these headphones with your favourite smartwatch, phone, tablet, laptop or music player, and enjoy wireless freedom up to about 65 feet away. Available in black or silver, these headphones are made with FSC-certified wood, stainless steel and exclusive Rewind fabric (made from hemp, recycled plastics and more). Other features include 50mm dynamic moving coil drivers, an in-line microphone to take calls, and controls on the right earcup for power, volume, tracking and more. Battery life lasts up to 12 hours.

Watch this

What to buy someone who loves his smartphone? How about a wearable accessory for it? Samsung has recently launched its newest wrist-mounted devices, the Gear S2, compatible with most Android devices and available in two versions: the Gear S2 Classic ($429.99) for the fashion-forward guy, or the more minimalist Gear S2 ($399.99) for the sport fanatic on the move. Both offer a circular design, rotating bezel to cycle through apps and an intuitive, personalized interface. Users can stay connected with at-a-glance notifications to check calendar appointments, text, emails and news.

The puck drops here

Face off as or against your favourite team in NHL 16 ($59.99), a fun and frantic hockey game for Xbox One and PlayStation 4.

Compared to last year's version, this new disc or download offers more accessible and responsive skating and shooting controls, a new progression system, sharper visuals and better commentary to get you pumped up while you play. NHL 16 offers multiple game types to choose from, whether you want to play by yourself, against a friend or family member beside you, or online against others.

1 Logitech Harmony Elite, $399.99
2 GoPro HERO4 Silver, from $529.99
3 House of Marley, Liberate XL Bluetooth headphones, $149.99
4 Samsung Gear S2 Classic, $429.99

Prices are subject to change at retailers' discretion.

metro TRAVEL
Your essential daily news

Kathy Griffin says her first-ever Carnival Cruise Lines comedy routines will rock the boat

Embracing America and Cuba

Lance McMillan
For Metro Canada

Dec. 17 will mark one year since U.S. President Barack Obama ordered the reestablishment of diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba.

As it stands now, restrictions imposed by the embargo have only been eased through executive action and pertain mainly to travel and telecommunication. But change, albeit small, can be readily seen.

Walking down the streets of Havana, it is not unusual to see locals wearing clothing adorned with the American flag. Even taxis with American flags hanging in the window or dangling from rearview mirrors have become commonplace.

The island nation cannot yet fully embrace any real change, however, as it is up to Congress to lift the embargo that went into effect back in 1961. While the previous 113th Congress may have been one of the most unproductive congresses in U.S. history, the current 114th Congress seems to be on a better track.

So if you're planning on escaping the cold Canadian winter, Cuba should be on the top of your list as it may be the last chance to see it in its current state.

ALL PHOTOS BY LANCE MCMILLAN

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tico.ca Cuba

Fly off to the Panhandle this winter

FLORIDA'S HIDDEN GEM

Bohemian hamlet, oyster capital among road trip stops

Steve Gow
For Metro Canada

This time of year, sun-seekers look south to Florida for an easy winter warm-up. But while the Sunshine State is mostly known for its massive family theme parks or Miami's nightlife, there is an overlooked side that's equally as enchanting: the Panhandle. Here's a quick look at the best of the state's northern coastline.

Pensacola

A great starting place, Pensacola delivers the liveliness of a major city alongside an eight-mile stretch of unspoiled beach that's practically deserted this time of year. Relax in the sun or wander around Fort Pickens — a well-preserved Civil War-era garrison located at the beach's western tip that notably included Apache warrior Geronimo among its historic internees.

For airplane buffs, the National Naval Aviation Museum is a world-class gallery complete with more than 150 aircraft, flight simulators and an IMAX theatre. Stay at the Margaritaville Beach Hotel and watch dolphins splash from your balcony as the spectacular sun rises over the Pensacola Pier.

The Emerald Coast

East of Pensacola, this beautiful coastline doesn't just possess pristine beaches but the unique town of Destin (known as the "World's Luckiest Fishing Village") is where anglers can reel in deep-water fish thanks to a nearby 100-foot underwater drop-off.

As you travel further east, don't miss Grayton Beach — a bohemian hamlet with one of the most idyllic beaches in America. While there, grab a drink at The Red Bar, a funky jazz club that's hosted such celebrities as Sheryl Crow within its kitschy art-covered walls. Finish the day at Panama City Beach with its many garish roadside attractions of go-karts and pirate-themed mini-golf.

The Pensacola Pier in front of the Margaritaville Beach Hotel at sunrise. STEVE GOW/FOR METRO

The Forgotten Coast

Before the coastline begins to curl south lies Florida's most seductive secret — the Forgotten Coast. The historic town of Apalachicola bleeds charm with its Victorian architecture and old brick warehouses. Once a main port for the cotton-boom era, Apalachicola is now the oyster capital of Florida, evident by the thousands of shucked shells adorning gardens and walkways. Try fresh mollusks at the popular Owl Café where you can wash the delicacies down with local ale from Oyster City Brewery.

For a real antebellum experience, stay at the Gibson Inn, a 108-year-old mansion wrapped in wide, white porches. For a great day trip, drive 90 minutes north to Wakulla Springs State Park to swim amongst endangered manatees and stop in Sopchoppy en route for a glimpse at the mysterious white squirrels that inexplicably inhabit the area — truly a wonder to behold.

LOCAL EATS

Sno-balls
A popular treat of shaved ice topped with a variety of flavoured syrups and cream is best served near Pensacola at Tommy's Sno-Balls — a beloved roadside shack with hundreds of varieties that include kitschy names like Worm Juice and Alligator Blood.

Grouper sandwich
In Florida's Panhandle, you can't go wrong with any fresh local seafood; however, the grouper sandwich is a Gulf Coast specialty. A meaty, light white fish, the grouper makes for a very flavourful feast whether grilled, fried or blackened.

Tupelo honey
Produced in the Apalachicola region, this rare liquid treasure is a top-grade nectar with the distinction of being the only honey in the world that won't granulate.

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TRAVEL NOTES BALI BARGAIN, FANCY LUGGAGE

Indonesia deal
Save up to $540 on Contiki's new eight-day Bali Island hopper trip when you book and pay before Dec. 23. With a shortie trip, you only have to take five days off work to hang out on Bali, Gili Trawangan and Lombok, one of the world's top hot spots. Besides island hopping, you'll be snorkelling and surfing, staying in four-star hotels and enjoying amazing Indonesian cuisine. Visit Contiki.com.

Lombok is just one island east of Bali. CONTRIBUTED

Ultimate carry-on
What to get the man who has everything? The perfect suitcase, of course. The new Ebby Rane Quartermaster Homme luxury carry-on keeps him organized, with seven inner pouches that fit together, guiding the packing process so nothing gets forgotten — ties, shoes, tech gear, shaving essentials, etc. A stylish little slice of Italian leather heaven. $1,230, at EbbyRane.com.

The new Quartermaster Homme carryon. CONTRIBUTED

New Cuba hotel
Just in time for the influx of American tourists, Iberostar Playa Pilar has opened on Key Guillermo in the Jardines del Rey archipelago, the hotel chain's 11th resort in Cuba. With 480+ rooms, the five-star resort faces the world's second-longest coral reef, and offers a flawless beach, three restaurants, plus a ton of water sports and nautical pursuits to help pass the time. Visit Iberostar.com.

The new Iberostar Playa Pilar, Cuba. CONTRIBUTED

Making Disney an even more magical kingdom

ORLANDO

Parks get boost in technology, new offerings

Vawn Himmelsbach
For Metro Canada

If you haven't been to Disney World in a while (or ever), the parks are making big changes — all designed to improve the guest experience.

From "smart" MagicBands to revamped offerings at the newly rebranded Disney Springs — not to mention a cool new Star Wars adventure — there's plenty of magic happening in Orlando, Fla.

And there are special deals for Canadians to help offset the decline of the loonie.

Disney Springs (formerly Downtown Disney) has been undergoing a complete transformation, with the addition of new neighbourhoods slated for completion this summer.

"Most of the change is happening in The Landing, a true retail and dining complex," said Darcy Clark, marketing manager for Disney Springs. "This is all about the dining."

A notable addition is Morimoto Asia, from Japanese master chef Masaharu Morimoto — known for his appearances on Iron Chef America — featuring pan-Asian cuisine such as Peking duck. More restaurants are slated to open in 2016.

Town Center is a brand-new neighbourhood for shoppers, currently under construction. "Our guests tell us when they're on vacation they want to shop — and not just for Mickey sweatshirts and Tinker Bell coffee mugs," said Clark. "They want designer handbags." Town Center will feature more than 60 third-party retailers, including the likes of Zara, Tommy Bahama, UGG and Sprinkles Cupcakes.

Over the past year, Disney has continued to roll out a number of enhancements it announced in 2014, including MagicBands, FastPass+ and a mobile app.

With MyDisneyExperience.com and the accompanying mobile app, guests can plan their trip, make changes on the go, purchase theme park tickets, make dining reservations and view an interactive map (as well as wait times for rides).

While wait times have been an issue in the parks, Disney has responded with FastPass+, allowing guests to reserve access to rides, shows or Disney character greetings either in advance or the day of their visit (wait times can be reduced from well over an hour to five or 10 minutes). Guests can make up to three selections at one park per day: Magic Kingdom, Animal Kingdom, Hollywood Studios and Epcot.

The MagicBand is an RF-enabled wristband that connects guests to the choices they made online. It serves as park admission and access to FastPass+ experiences, as well as a room key and optional payment method within the parks.

And, in the coming months and years, there will be new attractions to experience within the four parks.

This month will see the launch of the new Star Wars Launch Bay exhibit at Hollywood Studios, inspired by the latest film in the franchise, Star Wars: The Force Awakens. A Star Wars land will begin construction in 2016. And in 2017, Disney will launch The World of Avatar in Animal Kingdom with a ride called Na'vi River Journey.

FOR CANUCKS

To address the declining loonie, Disney's Canadian office is offering Canucks a discount on a package for a family of four that includes a five-night stay at a participating hotel with four-day theme park tickets, for travel completed by July 1, 2016. Another option is the Art of Animation Resort, which Disney opened in 2012 as a value-add budget property, ideal for kids with its Nemo-themed pool and Pixel Play arcade.

Animal Kingdom is bringing to life the mythical world of Pandora, inspired by the movie Avatar. CONCEPT ART, WALT DISNEY IMAGINEERING

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How flyers can make a smooth getaway

TRANSIT SERVICES

Cab-free ways to get to and from the airport in various cities

Loren Christie
For Metro Canada

Getting to and from the airport is often a last-minute consideration when planning your vacation. While taking a cab, car service or driving are options, it is worth investigating the more budget-friendly choices available. Cheapflights.ca recently released a compilation of the best alternatives for getting to and from the airport.

Toronto

There is a couple of choices available when making your way to and from Toronto's Pearson International. Toronto's public transit system (TTC) offers the cheapest option but the $3 fee requires you to schlepp your suitcase onto a bus to Kipling Station where you then transfer over to the subway.

A comfortable yet more expensive alternative is the Union Pearson Express, which speeds you between the airport and downtown Toronto's Union Station in just 25 minutes, with trains departing every 15 minutes between 5:30 a.m. to 1 a.m. A one-way fare is $27.50.

Vancouver

Getting between downtown and Vancouver International Airport is relatively easy. Located on Sea Island in Richmond, YVR is connected to the downtown via the convenient Canada Line Translink service.

A fantastic added convenience is the airport check-in kiosks at the following Canada Line stations: YVR-Airport, Templeton, Bridgeport, Marine Drive, Broadway-City Hall, Olympic Village, Vancouver City Centre and Richmond-Brighouse. The fares vary slightly, but expect to pay approximately $10.

Montreal

The 747 bus line runs between the Montréal-Trudeau airport and the central bus station downtown 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Depending on traffic, the trip can take between 45 and 60 minutes and the cost is $10, which actually buys you 24 hours of service throughout the STM bus and métro network.

IN ENGLAND

When it comes to convenience the London Underground is incredible. With regular service to and from all terminals to Central London you can get to any destination within the London transport network on a one-way ticket that will cost you roughly $10. The duration is between 60 and 80 minutes, depending on the destination.

Alternatively you can take the Heathrow Express train, which travels between Heathrow and London's Paddington Station. The ride lasts about 20 minutes and tickets booked 90 days in advance can cost as little as $11 one-way and $33 when purchased on the day of travel.

Vancouver International Airport is connected to the downtown via the convenient Canada Line Translink service. ED BIERMAN (FLICKR: EDBIERMAN)

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'Tis the season ... to snorkel with seals

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Nanaimo dive company says water is clearer this time of year

Snorkelling with harbour seals may seem like an unlikely Canadian wintertime activity, but tourism officials in Nanaimo say it's definitely doable.

A local dive company, Sundown Diving, takes visitors to Snake Island for the experience, providing the necessary equipment such as wetsuit, gloves, mask and snorkel. The island is a 15-minute boat ride from Nanaimo off the east coast of Vancouver Island.

Company owner Ed Singer says there are way fewer tourists on his $100-per-person tours now than in the summer, and the water is certainly chillier, but there is more to see.

"The water is clearer at this time of year. You're seeing more marine life, and you can see the seals swimming around under the water at a distance," Singer said.

"In the summer or spring when the visibility might be poor, often you're just seeing the seals coming close to you when their heads are above water."

He said his guests spend about 45 minutes in the water now, somewhat less than in the summer. No special skills are required.

"They don't have to be great swimmers because the suit is very buoyant, so they're gonna float for sure."

In Nanaimo, B.C., this winter? Consider taking a short boat ride out to Snake Island to swim among the harbour seals. ISTOCK

Not just a summer destination

Tourism Nanaimo wants potential visitors to know that the city is not just a summertime destination. It says year-round experiences include:

- The self-guided Nanaimo Bar Trail, along which you can taste variations of the sweet treat. The 2015 Nanaimo Bar Trail brochure has 34 stops.
- Culinary tours, which also drop in on breweries and wineries. Operators include Vancouver Island Expeditions, Tracks Outdoor Adventures and Harbour City Transportation.
- The Nanaimo Museum, where permanent exhibits include a replica coal mine shaft. In December the museum is presenting "Christmas in the Golden Age of Radio," featuring its radio collection.
- The Cedar Yellow Point Artisan Trail, highlighting artists who craft one-of-a-kind items.
- Gabriola Island, a short ferry ride away. Besides arts and dining options on the island, there are also Christmas craft fairs.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

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metro SPORTS

Jurgen Klopp's Liverpool topped their Europa League group after a 0-0 draw with FC Sion while Spurs also topped their group by beating Monaco 4-1

The wait is over ... Aldo and McGregor ready for battle

UFC

No love lost as cocky Irishman insists he'll beat proven champ

Jose Aldo is the only featherweight champion in UFC history. The brilliant Brazilian star is widely considered the pound-for-pound best mixed martial artist in the world. He hasn't lost a fight in 10 years.

And yet in the casinos of Las Vegas, Aldo is a betting underdog in the main event of UFC 194 on Saturday night.

Behold the power of Conor McGregor, the loquacious Irish challenger who has persuaded the world he can end 2015 by dethroning a king.

"He is already beaten," McGregor said. "I look in his eyes, and I see someone who knows his era is over. It's a new era. It's my era. I almost want to comfort him. I want to say, 'Don't worry. It will all be over soon."'

A year of promotional hype and fan anticipation culminates at the MGM Grand Garden Arena in the main event of the biggest show on a huge three-day weekend of UFC fights.

Aldo (25-1) and McGregor (18-2) have traded innumerable insults and menacing glares during the buildup to this injury-delayed showdown. It's finally time to find out whether

UFC featherweight champion Jose Aldo faces off with interim UFC featherweight champion Conor McGregor, right, during the final pre-fight news conference for UFC 194 at the MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas on Wednesday. LAS VEGAS SUN VIA THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

McGregor can back up some of the most delicious bravado in recent sports history.

"I get in there, and I put on a show," McGregor said. "I come to fight, and this fight will be a performance. I'm not just going to beat Jose. I'm going to embarrass Jose in there. I don't need to gather any more intel, any more research. It's done. He has already lost."

> **He is already beaten. I look in his eyes, and I see someone who knows his era is over. It's a new era. It's my era.**
> Ireland's Conor McGregor on champ Jose Aldo

While McGregor's personality is both magnetic and divisive, Aldo is no wallflower himself, as evidenced by his testy relations with the UFC for the past few years. He has reacted with amusement and anger to McGregor's provocations while adding his own jabs, albeit without the inimitable showmanship of McGregor's rants.

"I'm going to hit him, and he's going to sleep," Aldo said through a translator. "I don't really care how I win. I care about winning. Really the only difference is I always beat Americans, and this time I'm going to beat an Irishman."

Aldo could say little when he was injured in training shortly before he was originally scheduled to meet McGregor in July, scrapping an elaborate promotional campaign and providing more fodder for his challenger. McGregor took on the highly regarded Chad Mendes instead, scoring a second-round stoppage and earning an interim belt.

That honour didn't satisfy McGregor, whose plans for world domination aren't confined to one weight class or even one endeavour ("Hollywood is screaming for me," he said).

McGregor has attracted global attention to the grateful UFC, which has heavily showcased his magnetism and verbosity. He has become a fan favourite — particularly among his countrymen, who filled Vegas' casinos with songs and revelry before and after his victory over Mendes.

"I think it's going to be an electric atmosphere," McGregor said. "I feel the Brazilians will come out to support. They're going to be swallowed by the Irish, though. It's going to be a green Christmas in Las Vegas, that's for sure."

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

GOLF

Brooke's goals for 2016

Golfer Brooke Henderson had two dreams come true this year: she became a member of the LPGA Tour and won her first tournament at that level.

She's setting her sights even higher in 2016. Henderson hopes to continue her ascent on the top women's professional golf circuit and also lead Canada to the podium when the sport makes its return to the Olympic program next summer in Rio.

"It's an amazing opportunity that I have just to play in the Olympics and to play on the LPGA Tour. They're both dreams that I've had since I was young."

Henderson, a former top-ranked amateur, showed this past season that she was the real deal. Her statement performance came in August at the Cambia Portland Classic, when she blew away the field with a whopping eight-stroke victory.

Henderson was about three weeks shy of her 18th birthday at the time. She was granted immediate LPGA Tour membership by commissioner Mike Whan after the win.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Brooke Henderson GETTY IMAGES

INVESTIGATION

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Slats gets his due on banner night

NHL

Sather to be honoured for many years of Oilers success

Glen Sather wore the Oilers' sweater in the WHA, coached the NHL's greatest dynasty and managed in Edmonton for two decades. Now he'll finally have a banner to commemorate his hockey legacy in Alberta's capital.

Fifteen years after Sather left the organization, the Oilers will raise his banner to the rafters at Rexall Place on Friday night, alongside the numbers of Wayne Gretzky, Mark Messier, Jari Kurri, Paul Coffey, Glenn Anderson, Grant Fuhr, Al Hamilton and those celebrating five Stanley Cups and many more division and conference titles.

"I think the best thing I could say is if you asked those greats, those players, about Glen having his banner raised, they'll say that he warrants that as much as they do," former Oilers defenceman and current team president Kevin Lowe said last month in Toronto. "You can't say anything better than that."

Sather coached the Oilers during their transition from the WHA to the NHL and led them to the Cup final five times, winning it in 1984, 1985, 1987 and 1988. He ceded the bench to John Muckler after the 1988-89 season but still has as president and general manager for the Oilers' 1990 title.

"Slats was the straw that stirred the drink that got us all together and on the same path, and that's what's so special about him," Anderson said on a conference call. "Glen Sather was kind of the staple that put us all together and did everything that we needed to do to be successful."

During his coaching tenure, Sather coached immense talent better than almost anyone in the history of the sport. Throw Toe Blake, Al Arbour, Scotty Bowman and perhaps now even Joel Quenneville into that discussion.

Acquiring the likes of Gretzky and Messier was only half the battle. He had to manage egos and make such a talented group worth together.

"He was great at allowing Wayne to have three-minute shifts so he could score 200-hundred-how-ever-many-points he did," Lowe said. "And he allowed Mess to develop into what he was and Coff and Fuhrsie and all those great players. He had the vision of the style of play and that's all well-documented."

Sather, a 1997 Hockey Hall of Fame inductee in the builder category, was responsible for ushering in a different era of hockey. Former Calgary Flames general manager Cliff Fletcher said after the "hangover'' of the 1970s Philadelphia Flyers' "Broad Street Bullies" teams intimidating their way to the Cup, the Oilers represented the peak of skill.

"Glen, he was really ahead of his time,'' Fletcher said on a conference call.

"The way Glen believed in skill and speed, his teams you couldn't catch them to get a piece of them. He really changed the game, how the game's started to develop to be played with all the skill and speed he had on his teams.''

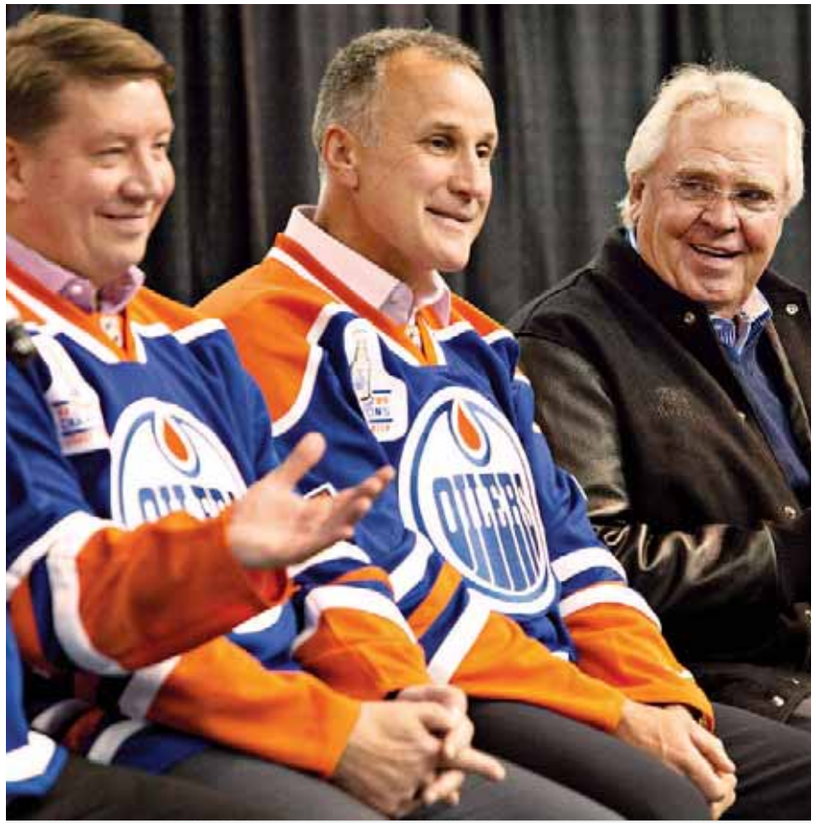
Anderson described Edmonton's style as almost a Soviet brand of hockey because there was so much speed and skill.

Fletcher said the NHL changed the rule on coincidental penalties to play five-on-five rather than four-on-four because of Sather's Oilers. Other teams didn't want to go up against Gretzky and Kurri or Messier and Anderson with Coffey and Charley Huddy on defence, and Sather pulling the strings.en there was the mental side of Sather's coaching, which Lowe described as almost contrarian. When players expected him to be difficult or easy, he was the opposite — and it worked.

> **Slats was the straw that stirred the drink.**
> Glenn Anderson

"The Oilers will go down in history as arguably the best team that was ever on the ice in the National Hockey League,'' Fletcher said. `Glen is definitely a legendary hockey man, and one of the greatest coaches and general managers this league's ever had."

THE CANADIAN PRESS



Jari Kurri, left, Paul Coffey and Glen Sather listen to teammates tells stories during last year's 1984 Stanley Cup reunion. JASON FRANSON/THE CANADIAN PRESS

VIGNEAULT TO COACH GAME 1,000

Alain Vigneault will coach his 1,000th NHL game on Friday when his New York Rangers visit the Edmonton Oilers.

The Quebec City native was in his late 30s and leading the Montreal Canadiens in the 2000-01 season when he was blindsided by an abrupt firing just over three years in.

He signed on with the QMJHL's PEI Rocket before the Vancouver Canucks hired him to coach their AHL affiliate. And in 2006, Vigneault was hired as coach of the NHL club.

Vancouver made the playoffs and Vigneault won coach of the year in his first campaign. Two Presidents' trophies followed, but Vancouver bowed out in the first round of the playoffs in 2012 and 2013, leading to his dismissal but he was later hired by the Rangers.

"This is a tough business to get into," he said. "In my case, it's tough business to get back into." THE CANADIAN PRESS

FIFA

Platini learns fate soon

Michel Platini will find out Friday morning if his 90-day FIFA ban will be temporarily lifted by the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

CAS said Thursday it will publish its ruling at 10 a.m. Swiss time.

Platini asked a CAS panel at a preliminary hearing on Tuesday to be allowed to work.

The UEFA president is currently banned and his FIFA presidential candidacy is on hold. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Michel Platini SHAUN BOTTERILL/GETTY IMAGES

ORIGINAL SIX ACTION WINGS HOST HABS Red Wings' Niklas Kronwall defends Canadiens' David Desharnais Thursday. For final score, see metronews.ca. PAUL SANCYA/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WORLD JUNIORS

Goalie's suspension creates competition

A mistake by Mackenzie Blackwood has opened up the competition for Canada's No. 1 goaltender at the world junior hockey championship.

Blackwood was Canada's presumptive starter for the upcoming international tournament until he earned an eight-game suspension in the Ontario Hockey League on Tuesday after slashing an opponent in the shoulder. He'll sit the first two games of the world juniors in Helsinki, leaving Mason McDonald to start for Canada against the United States and Denmark.

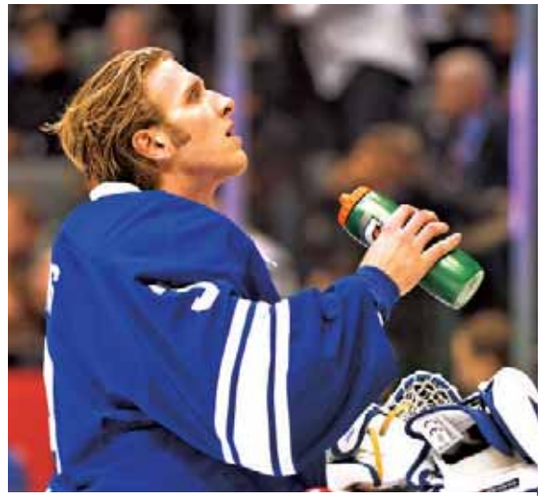
"I'm just going to take it as it is," said Blackwood on Thursday night after the first practice of Canada's selection camp. "I'm missing the first two games but when I get a chance I'm going to make the most of it and hopefully prove my worth then."

Blackwood GETTY IMAGES

Canada's original plan for the world juniors was to have Blackwood and McDonald as the only goaltenders at selection camp, with Ryan Jankowski, the team's director of player personnel, saying on Dec. 1 that Canada planned to cut down to 22 players with 13 forwards, seven defencemen and the pair of goalies. THE CANADIAN PRESS

New recruits reason for hope

PROTEAU-TYPE
Adam Proteau



Toronto Maple Leafs goaltender Garret Sparks has taken his chance and racked up decent numbers since his introduction to the big leagues. DARREN CALABRESE/THE CANADIAN PRESS

With more than one-third of the 2015-16 regular season in the books, the Maple Leafs are seven points out of the final wild card playoff spot in the Eastern Conference, But even if their performance drastically improves from its current 10-13-5 record, Toronto would have to leapfrog six teams in the standings to claim that berth.

In other words, the postseason still is going to be a long shot. But, knowing full well the organization was retooling, most Buds fans had prepared themselves for a tough year. That's why there's no prevailing sense of despair among the fan base.

The metrics have changed here now, and if you want to console yourself as a Leafs supporter, all you have to do is consider what the franchise has now versus what they had a year ago at this time.

Last year at this time, the Leafs were on the verge of falling apart and would finish the month of December with wins in only two of seven games before then-GM Dave Nonis fired head coach Randy Carlyle in early January and replaced him with interim bench boss Peter Horachek; Nonis would follow Carlyle out the organization's door at season's end.

This year, Toronto has one of the best coaches in the game in Mike Babcock, and arguably the game's most iconic GM in Lou Lamoriello. Neither will be going anywhere, either now or in the summer.

Last year, the Leafs employed a goaltending duo of Jonathan Bernier and James Reimer — and Reimer was about to spiral into a stretch that saw him lose 12 of 13 decisions through mid-March.

This year, although Bernier has struggled mightily at the NHL level and is currently rebuilding his game in the AHL, Reimer's performance has rebounded better than many expected — and during his current absence due to injury, Marlies netminder Garret Sparks has seized his opportunity and won three of his first four career NHL games, providing the franchise with some hope and depth for the present and future. Last year at this time, Toronto hadn't yet drafted OHL sensation Mitch Marner, and the team's top prospect, William Nylander, was just getting acclimated to the professional level with the Marlies. This year, Marner is steamrolling the competition in junior, and Nylander is doing the same in the second-best league on the planet. See where I'm going with this? And I haven't even mentioned prospects Connor Brown, Travis Dermott, Kasperi Kapanen and Brendan Leipsic. Only Brown was with the organization as of December 2014.

Mitch Marner is a Leafs star of the future THE CANADIAN PRESS

The road ahead isn't going to be easy, but real and meaningful change doesn't happen overnight. It's an incremental process, and in less than a calendar year, there's been more than enough improvement to justify optimism in Leafs Land.

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RECIPE Mini Turkey Meatloaves

PHOTO: MAYA VISNYEI

Ceri Marsh & Laura Keogh
For Metro Canada

These meatloaves are great to make ahead and freeze — then you can pull out as many (or as few) as you need on any given night.

Ready in
Prep time: 60 minutes
Serves 4

Ingredients
- 1 Tbsp olive oil
- 1/3 cup onion, diced fine
- 1/3 cup celery, diced fine
- 1/3 cup carrot, diced fine
- 1 tsp fennel seeds
- 1/2 cup of rolled oats
- 1 1/2 lb of ground turkey
- 1/4 cup ketchup
- 1 egg
- 1/4 cup Parmesan, grated
- 2 Tbsp ketchup
- 1 tsp Worcestershire sauce

Directions
1. Preheat the oven to 375 F.
2. Warm up olive oil in a pan over medium heat. Add your vegetables and the fennel seeds and allow them to soften, about 3 to 5 minutes. Remove from the heat and allow to cool a bit.
3. In a large mixing bowl, place meat, oats, ketchup, sauteed vegetables, cheese and a whisked egg. Mix it all together thoroughly — you want each bite to have a mix of all the elements.
4. Using a 1/3 cup measure, scoon mixture and place each scoop into a cup of a muffin tin. In a small bowl, mix together 2 Tbsp of ketchup and 1 tsp of Worcestershire sauce. Use a small spoon to smear this glaze over the top of your mini meatloaves.
5. Bake for 40 minutes. The internal temperature for meatloaf should be 160 to 165 F.

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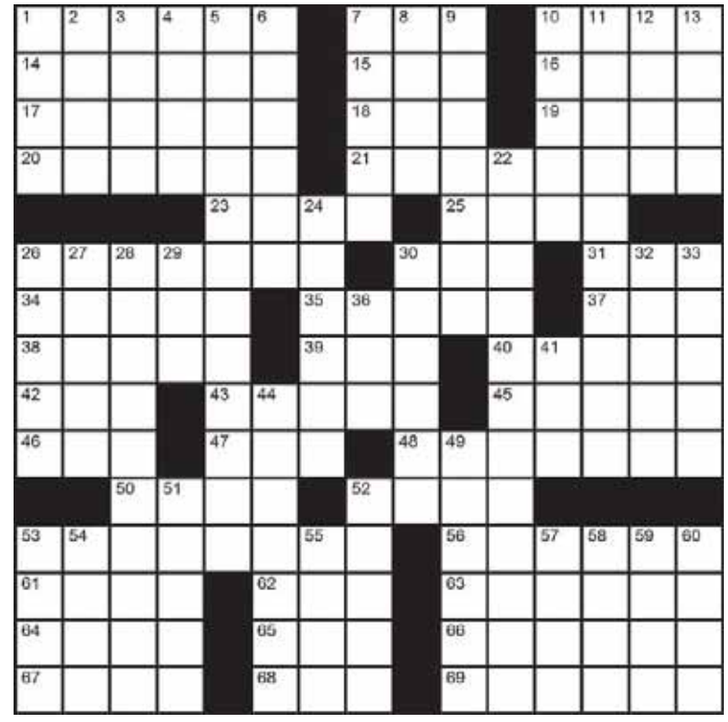
CROSSWORD Canada Across and Down

BY KELLY ANN BUCHANAN



ACROSS
1. "Sleep that knits up the ravell'd _ of care..." - Macbeth, Act II, Scene 2
7. Joan of _
10. Cried
14. _ _ pants
15. _ polloi
16. Some: 2 wds.
17. Mosaic components
18. Ms. DeGeneres, to pals
19. Single-named rock bassist
20. Bahamas capital
21. Prized-players
23. Alum
25. 'Class' or 'Luck' suffix
26. Javas
30. Ms. Field of movies, to pals
31. Financial deg.
34. Precise
35. Pedestal
37. Western prov.
38. 1970s music
39. Klutz
40. Feigned cry of enthusiasm: 2 wds.
42. Want _ (Newspaper section)
43. Ms. Shriver
45. Some space objects
46. Ms. McEntire, briefly
47. Hill-building insect
48. Archived documents
50. Better Than _ (Rock band)
52. Alberta village southeast of Calgary
53. In a sincere manner
56. "That's groovy with me.": 2 wds.
61. Certain conjunctions
62. Not 'neath
63. Ms. Dion of song
64. Leave in, in proofreading
65. Ms. Lambert of country, to pals
66. Some wading birds
67. _ de combat (Out of action)
68. Impatient shout!
69. Computer clickety-click-clickers

DOWN
1. Rotate
2. Moon goddess
3. Building additions
4. Woeful word
5. From Earth, one would take approximately six to eight months: 3 wds.
6. Make certain/check
7. Up in front
8. Breadbasket bun
9. Irish actor Mr. Murphy of new whale adventure "In the Heart of the Sea" (2015)
10. Drifts through the air
11. "Op.23, No.6, Prelude in _-_ _" by Russian composer/pianist Rachmaninoff
12. Equal
13. Christmas poem opener...
22. Newfoundland: Locale on Fogo Island for those who rarely-stop-over?
24. Classify
26. Aromatic tree
27. Zinc _ (Skin irritation cream)
28. Michael who plays the Scottish lead in "Macbeth" (2015)
29. US broadcasting regulator
30. Journey amongst the lions
32. 1990: Madonna's _ Ambition World Tour
33. Chasm
36. _ Chi (Martial Art)
41. Owl's utterance
44. "_ of a Murder" (1959) starring James Stewart
49. Draw out a response
51. Piquancies
52. Christmastime resin
53. Mixture
54. Not duped: 2 wds.
55. "Star Wars" (1977) role
57. Bit from a movie
58. Van Gogh's Bank of the _ at Auvers
59. Humdinger
60. Fewer

IT'S ALL IN THE STARS by Sally Brompton

Aries March 21 - April 20
Everything should be going well for you now and today's new moon in your fellow Fire sign of Sagittarius will make life even more enjoyable.

Taurus April 21 - May 21
Today's new moon puts emphasis on finances, especially investments and property issues and anything of a monetary nature that involves other people. Lady Luck is smiling on you, so make some profitable moves.

Gemini May 22 - June 21
If you have fallen out with a partner, loved one or friend, or even a work colleague, this is the perfect day to get back on good terms with them. You may have to admit you were wrong but it will be worth it.

Cancer June 22 - July 23
It's unlikely you will be impressed by someone's aggressive attitude. Do not, however, try to confront them. They just got out of the wrong side of bed this morning.

Leo July 24 - Aug. 23
Today's new moon urges you not to limit yourself in any way, shape or form. Creatively and professionally you are at the top of your game, so be active, be ambitious and above all be assertive.

Virgo Aug. 24 - Sept. 23
Get tough with someone. If you don't do it now it will mean an even bigger showdown later on, so let them know where they are going wrong and what they can do to make it right.

Libra Sept. 24 - Oct. 23
Cosmic activity in the area of your chart that governs your ability to communicate makes it easy for you to win people over. Use that ability to get others to do the small stuff while you focus on the big picture.

Scorpio Oct. 24 - Nov. 22
If you get an offer that could bring you money you should take it. It will mean more work and you will have to sacrifice other things but if you turn it down you will kick yourself later.

Sagittarius Nov. 23 - Dec. 21
Look out for your own interests and do something for yourself for a change. Today's new moon in your sign promises great things will happen. You deserve your success.

Capricorn Dec. 22 - Jan. 20
You may be tempted to give up on something today but the planets warn if you stop now you will regret it later in the month. Keep going. You are on the brink of a breakthrough.

Aquarius Jan. 21 - Feb. 19
This is a good time for friendships and group activities but don't spread yourself thin. Where your work and creative activities are concerned don't start anything new because what happens tomorrow will require all your attention and energy.

Pisces Feb. 20 - March 20
You may be ambitious but the planets warn you won't be able to reach your goals alone. Look for people who can assist you and ask for help.

CONCEPTIS SUDOKU by Dave Green

Every row, column and box contains 1-9

5	6			3				
2		3				1		
	1		4				7	
		8						
1				6				3
						8		
	5				9		1	
		6				4		5
				5			6	8

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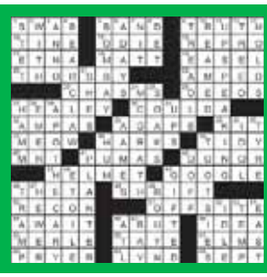

4	2	6	1	9	8	3	7	5
7	3	8	6	5	4	9	2	1
9	5	1	3	7	2	4	8	6
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6	7	3	2	8	1	5	9	4
8	4	9	7	3	5	1	6	2
3	6	7	4	1	9	2	5	8
1	9	5	8	2	7	6	4	3
2	8	4	5	6	3	7	1	9

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